

TOP STORY: NAFTA'S BORDERLINE INSANITY

September 6 - 19, 1993

IN THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

WAR WITHOUT END

*Up to
200 million
anti-personnel
land mines are
claiming new
victims in old
battlefields
worldwide.*

James North
reports

page 16

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Photographs by Bobby Neel Adams

EDITORIAL

CLINTON'S FAVOR TO THE AMERICAN LEFT

As president, Bill Clinton has not given the left much to cheer about. Those who hoped that he would follow through on his promises to create well-paying jobs, guarantee access to higher education for all Americans, help rebuild our cities and provide alternatives to crime as a way of life for the urban poor, no doubt feel betrayed. Indeed, the president's total failure to fight for the programs he espoused during the campaign surprised even those of us who looked at Clinton's background (and his backers) and expected little change.

Yet Clinton has done the American left one great favor. In a few short months he has demonstrated the limits and ultimate folly of identity politics. Clinton has put together an administration that more accurately reflects the country's ethnic and gender makeup than that of any of his predecessors. His cabinet includes a record five African-Americans. It includes two Hispanics and more women in responsible positions than ever before. And even though he backed down under pressure, Clinton paid back his gay supporters by making a faltering gesture to end discrimination against homosexuals in the armed services.

But Clinton has shown little interest in the underlying needs of these constituencies. His administration wants to have every ethnic and gender group represented in a government that preserves the misery of corporate domination of American life. While providing many traditional Democratic constituencies with the appearance of influence, his policies, and the flaccid way in which he pursues them, belie commitment to their needs.

This has been demonstrated on issues that have the potential to challenge corporate power and influence as well as those that don't. Take health care. While leaving the "Big Five"

In a few short months, Clinton has demonstrated the ultimate folly of identity politics.

insurance companies unchallenged, Clinton is proposing to finance universal coverage by taxing those who can least afford it: small employers and their workers. Not surprisingly, this proposal has aroused the ire of the small business associations. This, in turn, has led Clinton to consider reducing benefits or raising the amount that working people will have to pay for their coverage. So small business is pitted against workers and the poor, while the insurance industry, the major source of social waste in the system, remains above the fray.

Clinton claims that this is necessary, because of insurance industry clout in Congress. But it would be hard to conceive of an industry

more universally despised than the insurance companies. If any group is politically vulnerable, it is they—that's why they have to contribute such enormous amounts of money to members of Congress and to spend so much on lobbyists. A president whose first concern was affordable universal coverage could carry the whole country with a vigorous public campaign for a single-payer system that even government studies show to be the least expensive proposal.

A similar defense of the status quo was involved in Clinton's handling of Lani Guinier's nomination as head of the civil rights division of the Department of Justice. Much has been made of Clinton's spinelessness in backing down on this one. But the issue on which Guinier's nomination foundered is also significant. Guinier was shot down in Congress in large part because she advocated a form of proportional representation in majority districts that consistently freeze out minority representation. Clinton said he had not known her views on this, and that he withdrew her nomination because of them. Taking him at his word, this would mean that he put a higher value on protecting the status quo than on providing democratic representation of African-Americans. In other words, it's OK to have blacks in his administration as long as they don't rock the boat.

Clinton does seem genuinely committed to women's rights, though even this commitment is largely class-based. Other things being equal, the more women in positions of power and influence the better. The vast majority of women, however, are among the working poor, and neither Clinton nor the women in his administration are their champions, as the administration's recently adopted budget made clear.

As long as various identity groups pursue their narrow self-interest, the underlying reality of corporate power will escape scrutiny and the various identity groups will continue to be victims of manipulation. That's the lesson of the Clinton administration so far. But Clinton's is not an ideological commitment—and political pressure can change his direction. That, however, would require a new inclusive politics on the left.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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LETTERS

Looking for Mr. Goodbar

An analogy to your "Save our president" editorial (*ITT*, Aug. 9) is the bride who vainly believes she can reform her hard-drinking, physical-abusing, womanizing husband into a sober, loving and compassionate companion.

Clinton's spots began to show through when he left the New Hampshire primary to oversee the execution of a mentally deficient prisoner—this to solicit the approval of the hang-'em-high voters.

After his election, his spots became clearly pronounced and clearly permanent. He has failed to follow through on his initiative on gays in the military, a simple universal health program,

meaningful student loans, no-surrender environmental clean-ups, inner-city financial relief and every other controversial reform backed by liberals.

He has given no more than lip service to social reform, appointing Ron Browns and Lloyd Bentsens to high office and catering to the anti-Arab nuts by lobbing missiles into Baghdad neighborhoods.

It is hopeless to change a man clearly convinced that the status quo is the best path to re-election.

This is the time to forget Clinton and rally behind a true progressive like Ralph Nader, Ron Daniels or Jesse Jackson. Confront George Herbert Walker Clinton with someone proven to be able to, as you say, "put people first."

Stewart MacMillan
Guffin Bay, N.Y.

Nothing else there

The problem with John B. Judis' analysis (*ITT*, Aug. 9) is the mistaken assumption that Bill Clinton is "compromising" in order to win other battles. We have seen that Clinton will back down on virtually any issue when faced with even a small amount of opposition.

The saying keeps coming to mind, "If you don't stand for something you'll fall for anything." Perhaps Clinton needs to keep this in mind before his "falling for anything" leads to his fall from the White House.

Jeri D. Shepherd
Greeley, Colo.

Where is the movement?

Perhaps it is good that Clinton has friends at *In These Times*. Readers who see him as "our knight in shining armor." Editors who will help "save Clinton from himself." Correspondents who support Clinton's betrayal of principle so that he will not "undermine his presidency," and so that the Democrats can be re-elected to the White House.

But what is the value of Clinton's presidency and of having Democrats in the White House? Will corporate power be curtailed by a former leader of the Democratic Leadership Council?

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



Will the wholesale destruction of the natural environment be significantly reduced by the other party of capital? Will militarism and U.S. aggression in the Third World be eroded by those who supported the Gulf War and the murder of innocents in Iraq (and El Salvador, and Vietnam, and Nicaragua, and...)?

Who benefits from Clinton's health plan, his economic plan, etc.? I believe that answering these questions raises another, more important question: Who benefits from the assumption that political choice in this country must be between the Republicans and the Democrats, between Bob Dole and Bill Clinton, between the complete dominance of corporate capitalism and the almost complete dominance of corporate capitalism, between the rapid destruction of the environment and the slightly less rapid destruction of the environment, between the violent oppression of the Third World and the violent oppression of the Third World? In the answer to this last question lies the heart of a truly progressive social movement.

Frantz Lipsey
Rochester, N.Y.

Class vs. race

As a bilingual (Spanish-English) teacher of white, Jewish and working-class descent who has worked in inner-city schools by choice for over eight years, I am somewhat disturbed by Beverly Cross' "Two worlds, one classroom" (*ITT*, July 12).

Cross overemphasizes the importance of race and culture in training her student teachers to educate children who are different from them and avoids the more important issue of class. In lumping together white and middle class to describe the values, attitudes and beliefs that create the barriers that keep her teacher trainees from being effective in the classroom, she perpetuates the racism and ignorance she claims to be against.

Certainly, race and culture are issues to which teachers must be sensitive. But I believe that class differences between teachers and students create more of a rift than race. I have witnessed much greater "culture shock" among middle-class African-Americans and Latinos as they begin to work in inner-city classrooms than among Anglos who have known poverty and understand working-class issues.

Cross is concerned that when describing their problems in the classroom, teachers mention discipline, motivation and the stress of meeting individual learning styles, rather than race and culture. This is because classroom problems transcend race and culture. Discipline, motivation and stress are the most salient problems in almost all classrooms—suburban, rural, Anglo, Latino, African-American.

Until we look more closely at economic backgrounds, until our affirmative action programs take class into consideration, until we stop lumping middle class and white together in describing a particular set of values, we are merely perpetuating racism. Like racism, middle-class values seem to come in all colors.

Mindy Pines
Carmel Valley, Calif.

Lucky blacks

Like Salim Muwakkil, I regret that the Radical Republicans were never able to implement their plan to share slave owners' land with ex-slaves (*ITT*, July 12). However:

The slaves are all dead.

The slave owners are all dead.

Even if we believe guilt is passed down in the genes, most white Americans are not descended from slave owners. (My parents immigrated from Eastern Europe in 1950, by the way.)

As for the descendants of slaves, it is difficult to argue that they are worse off because of slavery. As one African-American writer put it,

absent slavery they would be living in unimaginably dire poverty and insecurity in Africa.

Taras Wolansky
Jersey City, N.J.

The wrong fields

"Bad vibes," the cover story on electromagnetic fields (EMF) in the June 28 issue, contributes little to our understanding of this public health concern. Of course, tales of personal experiences with cancer are compelling; unfortunately, seldom does one know the true cause of this dreaded disease.

The Swedish research that is purported to be causing scientists to reassess their opinions about EMF and cancer is equivocal—the existence of risk depends on how one chooses to measure "dosage" of EMF. In a recent letter to *Science* (April 2), the Swedish scientists concede that the total number of childhood leukemias near powerlines is virtually identical to the expected number, based on rates for the population at large (142 vs. 138).

Scientists on both sides of the issue agree on one thing: more research is necessary before new standards are promulgated. Before requiring massive expenditures on remediation of what may prove to be a non-problem, there needs to be a clear understanding of what measures of EMF are relevant, what amount of risk reduction will a new standard provide, and how much will it cost. It will be a few years before enough is known to propose rational standards for low-frequency EMF. Meanwhile, it is a disservice for *In These Times* to give such prominence to the utility cover-up cum conspiracy theory of Paul Brodeur and his ilk.

Roland Finston, Ph.D.
Health Physicist
Stanford University

Hysteria

Like most fearmongers, Peter White (*ITT*, June 28) cites a litany of anecdotes—change a few words and you

wouldn't know if his horror stories were attributed to electromagnetic fields (EMF) or witchcraft. However, as anyone who reviews the scientific literature will find, the case for a causal link between low-intensity, low-frequency EMF and any disease, other than hysteria, is about as well-established as cold fusion.

EMF fears go back to the days of Edison. After all, electricity can kill. But 60-hertz photons cannot possibly cause cellular damage, and the electric and magnetic fields we are concerned with are much weaker than fields that occur naturally in the body. White quotes one source as saying, "We don't know the mechanism for asbestos or cigarette smoke, either." Nonsense! Poisoning by substances is not mysterious. Burning produces chemical fragments, some of which bind to DNA. But no one has been able to suggest a plausible mechanism for EMF pathogenesis.

This does not prove that there is no effect, but decades of research have not led to a consensus. Some studies see it; others don't. The ones that do usually report effects at the threshold of detectability. These could be statistical flukes.

In response to the current panic wave, EMF research has been intensified. However, if the gloomiest findings to date are verified, EMF would remain a minor threat compared to other known risk factors. The billions that could be spent to reduce EMF from power lines, for example, would be better used in other public health investments.

White unfairly divides scientists into "EMF activists" and "industry skeptics," asserting that doubters have been co-opted by the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI). But the EPRI has been all too willing to sow alarm about EMF. White hits the nail sideways when he asks who should pay for settling lawsuits and rewiring America. Who do you think will pay? Most utilities are regulated to a fixed rate of return; if their costs increase, so do their profits. Meanwhile, GE and Westing-



house will be busy minting new "low field" equipment—and money.

Mark A. Gubrud
Washington, D.C.

Peter White replies: The EMF debate has political, moral and economic considerations as well as scientific ones. We should weigh the science along with other factors in setting policy guidelines.

Roland Finston is right in stating that scientists on both sides of the EMF debate think more research is needed. But he is wrong in concluding that new EMF standards must wait until new research is concluded.

As I pointed out, officials of the Swedish energy department, NUTEK, decided to impose stricter EMF standards based on the current level of research.

The historical record shows that the EPRI has always been willing to fund epidemiological EMF studies, and regardless of their outcome, such studies are invariably criticized by researchers from the "hard" sciences. The result is a consensus that "more research is needed." In this context, doing more research on EMFs isn't just a call for value-free inquiry. It's taking a position not to support regulatory action.

Consider secondhand cigarette smoke. According to Myron Levin of the Los Angeles Times, the tobacco industry was unable to mount an effective campaign against anti-smoking measures around the country because

it had no credibility.

So it did the only thing it could. It opened its wallet to seemingly neutral authorities whose research would deflect concern or create that sense of ambiguity that sends regulatory measures to the grave.

Paul Brodeur may be overstating the utility cover-up of EMF hazards, but remember, he was right about asbestos. Brodeur was called a fear-monger by asbestos-industry flacks, but in the end his clarion call about asbestos saved lives.

Mark Gubrud's argument that cell damage doesn't occur at the weak level of powerline EMFs is the position of EMF hard-liners like Yale's Robert Adair. Current cellular and animal research funded and administered federally—not by the power industry—may settle this part of the EMF controversy.

Clarification

"Making peace practical," Randy Wilson's story about the Economic Conversion Project of Maine (ITT, July 12), was paid for in part by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters with wide margins.

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IN SHORT



KILLING TO PLEASE

Clinton plays politics with the electric chair

of crimes that could warrant death to 47.

The proposal comes as part of the president's "anti-crime" bill. But surely Clinton knows that the death penalty does not deter crime: the murder rate is no higher in states that do not have capital punishment than in those that do. And the deficit-conscious Clinton must be aware that the death penalty is a budget-buster: in Florida, for example, each death sentence is estimated to set taxpayers back \$3.18 million (because of costs associated with the legal

Bill Clinton is proposing what the Justice Department proudly trumpets as "the largest-ever expansion of the federal death penalty." The White House is planning to increase the number



By Woody Igou

A smite crazy

The Rev. David Trosch was rebuked by the Catholic church after attempting to place an ad in a Mobile, Ala., newspaper. The ad showed a man pointing a gun at a doctor preparing to perform an



abortion, accompanied by the words "justifiable homicide." The priest's anti-abortion sentiments had been "intensified" by the nearby shooting of an abortionist in Pensacola, Fla.

Can't marry women, but sure can fondle those guns.

The international poop

Norway's environmental minister caused a diplomatic panic during a stern speech at a recent rally criticizing Britain's environmental secretary. Gripping over English acid rain that falls in Norway, he stated, "The English environmental minister is the biggest *drittsekk* (bag of excrement) I have ever met in my life."



In your next speech, don't forget to wear the EPA-approved "potty mouth" filter.

Soulless in Oakland

Authorities are still looking for members of the crowd who encouraged a woman's

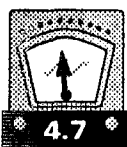


attacker to murder her. According to witnesses, a dozen people chanted "Kill

her, kill her!" as the woman was stabbed to death. Congratulations! We've topped the Kitty Genovese episode.

Help them, Bob Dole!

After some anguish, the Italian Parliament abolished a tax law making dead Italians and



their estate responsible for an annual health care tax in the year of their death.

The health minister conceded there was no way to enforce payment of the tax. Like a poll tax in Chicago.

Nice name

The \$1.6 billion sale of a huge electric power plant to private investors in a Mexican town



near the Texas border has been stalled after initial assessments indicated air

pollution could blow over the border and diminish the air quality at Big Bend National Park in Texas. The plant's name is Carbon II. Which is so much nicer to inhale than carbon 1.

APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Weightless banality
2. Green Acres stupid
3. Malicious cretinism
4. Howard Sternesque
5. Mary Matalin mean
6. Gangrenous venality
7. A touch of evil
8. A cancer in the Zeitgeist
9. Is tu, Pol Pot?
10. Horseperson of the Apocalypse

process), while a life sentence (40 years) costs about \$516,000. The Democratic president must also know that capital punishment is, in practice, racist: it is disproportionately applied to those who kill white people.

So why is the chief executive pushing forward with his plan? Because in addition to those other facts, Bill Clinton knows that between 70 and 75 percent of Americans support capital punishment, according to public opinion polls. Clinton simply values votes more than rational policy, more than balanced budgets, more, even, than human life.

In this, Clinton is like many politicians. Take Texas Gov. Ann Richards. Though possessing the power to request executive clemency, this "liberal" Democrat has presided over more executions than any other governor in the state's history.

Or take Johnny Holmes. Never heard of Johnny Holmes? A lot of people on death row sure have. Holmes is the district attorney for Harris County, Texas. Since the U.S. Supreme Court restored the death penalty in 1976, Harris County has been responsible for 25 executions. That number is more than any state except Florida. And nearly a third of all those awaiting the death penalty in Texas come from Harris County.

One of those people is Gary Graham. Graham, as syndicated columnist Cynthia Tucker observes, is "not the kind of guy you would want in your neighborhood." He has admitted to committing 10 armed robberies as a teenager. During one of them, he shot and wounded one of his victims. But Graham isn't on death row for that. He's there for the 1981 murder of a man outside a Houston grocery store. And, nice guy or not, Gary Graham appears to be innocent of that killing.

Graham was convicted on the testimony of a lone witness who saw the killer's face for no more than a second while sitting in her car almost 40 feet away at nighttime. She couldn't pick Graham's picture out of a photo lineup. She did, however, peg him in a police lineup the next day—perhaps because he was the only suspect to appear in both lineups.

None of the other witnesses who saw the killing were able to identify Graham. In fact, they described a man of much shorter build. One woman, who stood at the supermarket checkout line next to the killer, has sworn that Graham was not the same man. This witness was never called to testify at his trial. No other evidence links Graham to the murder.

Perhaps it goes without saying that Gary Graham is black and the murder victim white.

On August 16, less than six hours before Graham was scheduled to die by lethal injection, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals granted him a stay of execution. On September 29, the court will hear arguments about whether the case should go before the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. But even if that happens, don't bet on justice.

Last year, 31 people were executed in the United States—the highest number in three decades. Only three nations executed more people, according to Amnesty International. They were those well-known practitioners of human rights, China, Iran and the former Soviet Union. This year, the United States is on a clip to exceed 1992's record. And with Clinton's new proposal, more banner years are sure to follow.

Several years ago, a *Stanford Law Review* study estimated that 23 innocent people have been executed in 20th-century America. If Gary Graham adds to that number, it's no sweat off Bill Clinton's back. Dead men don't vote.

—Miles Harvey

TORY TROUBLE

A seedy financial scandal jolts Britain's Conservatives

challenge over his support for the Maastricht Treaty on European political and economic union. Polls this summer showed that Major is the most unpopular prime minister since the '30s.

But one of the worst disasters for Major and the Tories came in June with the explosion of a political scandal involving Asil Nadir, a fugitive businessman of Turkish Cypriot descent. The affair centers on revelations that the Conservative Party had accepted 440,000 pounds (nearly \$700,000) from Nadir in the late '80s, and that several cabinet members and MPs had attempted to intervene with British authorities on Nadir's behalf in his legal, political and financial affairs. Nadir was arrested in 1990 on charges of theft and false accounting after the \$2 billion collapse of his Polly Peck company.

Nadir jumped bail in early May of this year and escaped to the Turkish-occupied area of Cyprus, from which he cannot be extradited. To make matters worse, the bail, a record \$5.2 million, may be uncollectable. Much of it had been Nadir's own money, in violation of bail regulations, and therefore subject to claims by Nadir's many creditors.

The Tories have promised to return the 440,000 pounds if it turns out to have been stolen. Michael Mates, the cabinet minister who was closest to Nadir, was forced to resign in late June in an attempt to put an end to the controversy.

But the worst for the Tories may be yet to come. Safely in Cyprus, Nadir now claims to have given a total of more than \$2 million to the Conservatives and to have tapes of phone conversations with leading members of the party. According to the London *Observer*, he is "planning Watergate-style revelations from the tapes and documentary evidence which would damage the government which has sought to distance itself from him."

Nadir began making secret donations to the Tory party in 1985; most were made around the time of the 1987 election. The money came from his Polly Peck company and a subsidiary, but the payments were not disclosed to the company board.

Nadir told Turkish Cypriots that he was trying to buy recognition for the self-declared state of "the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," an entity recognized only by Turkey. In view of the calls from several senior Conservative back-benchers for just such recognition, Nadir seems to have had some success. He may also have been a factor in British tolerance of the continued stalemate in Cyprus, for which the U.N. secretary general has explicitly blamed the Turkish side in recent years.

In 1974, the Greek junta in Athens attempted to overthrow the government of Cyprus, giving the Turkish military an excuse to invade and seize the northern 37 percent of the island on behalf of the Turkish Cypriots, who make up 18 percent of the population. Greek Cypriots who did not flee Turkish bombing and invasion forces were subsequently expelled from the occupied area.

Nadir, then a small businessman in London, was invited back to his native Cyprus to make the most of the fruit left rotting in Greek Cypriot orchards in the Morphou area. He bought Polly Peck, a shell company on the London Exchange,

It's been a rough year for British Prime Minister John Major. His Conservative Party suffered stunning defeats in local elections, and the prime minister himself had to face a tough parliamentary chal-

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

It's official

If you think you're seeing more product plugs on TV than ever before, you're right. An *Advertising Age* study focused on the Chicago area showed an increase, on network-owned stations, of more than 10 percent since last year.

Ready for the prequel?

Now available for licensing is "Baby Bart," who joins the MuppetBabies and the Flintstone Kids as a younger version of an established character. For now, he's just a product, but if history is borne out, look for the program to follow.

Back again

In the midst of furious policy discussion over the future of government broadcast services overseas—especially in East Asia, where the U.S. might install a kind of "Radio Free China"—one of the worst ideas of the '80s refuses to die: TV Martí. Planned as a televisual subversion of Fidel Castro's government through programs such as *Wrestlemania*, a Spanish version of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* and a neatly tailored U.S. Information Agency-produced news program, it has suffered technical difficulties from the start.

It's been five months since the last time the balloon antenna—which sent signals to Cuba only between 3:30 and 6 a.m., so as not to scramble other radio transmissions—went down over the Florida Keys. Meanwhile, taxpayers have spent about \$60,000 a day to keep it going

anyway. The signal was sent via satellite, the only problem being that satellite dishes are illegal (and obtrusive) in Cuba. Now a new balloon is back up, ready to be sacrificed to tropical storms, and appropriations for the service continue to be anted up.

Different worlds

African-American journalists and (mostly white) bosses have profoundly different views of newsroom working conditions, according to a survey by the National Association of Black Journalists. For instance: Bosses almost unanimously believe that skin color doesn't affect opportunities for advancement; less than a quarter of African-American journalists think that's true in their case. Ninety percent of managers say they're trying to recruit African-American journalists. Only half the journalists agree. And bosses believe minority journalists are at least and maybe more likely to get mentoring, while nearly three-quarters of the journalists say they are less likely to get support on the job.

By the way...

For a sassy, authoritative look at corporate media's performance over the last few years, check out *Adventures in Media-land: Behind the News, Beyond the Pundits*, by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting's Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon (Common Courage Press, Box 702, Monroe, ME 04951, 207-525-0900). A collection of op-eds from 1991 to just about yesterday, it recalls and documents strange collusions between money, power and information. Manuel Noriega, AIDS, the spotted owl, GE and Dan Quayle are all part of the mix.

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for pennies a share in 1980 in order to expand his fruit-exporting business.

With free fruit, low wages and tax concessions from Turkish Cypriot officials, Nadir was able to claim handsome profits and send the stock price soaring. He expanded rapidly, moving into electronics, banks, newspapers and hotels in Turkey as well as the occupied area. Polly Peck was considered one of the hottest properties on the London Exchange for much of the '80s.

But in August 1990, Nadir finally overstepped himself by making an aborted takeover attempt that sent Polly Peck's stock reeling. That triggered the attention of British regulatory authorities, who had rejected an earlier request to look at the company. Their findings led to SFO (Serious Fraud Office) raids on the office that handled the Nadir family trust and on Polly Peck's offices. The stock plunged on news of the first raid, and trading in Polly Peck was suspended.

The company stopped payment on its debts of more than \$2 billion and was put into receivership. Shortly afterward, Nadir was declared bankrupt; his personal debts were estimated at more than \$70 million.

The SFO's investigation turned up a complex mess involving unauthorized transfer of funds; a lot of the company's money had found its way into northern Cyprus. Polly Peck's administrators also informed creditors that the profits of a fruit subsidiary in Turkey "may have been significantly overstated." Nadir was arrested in December 1990.

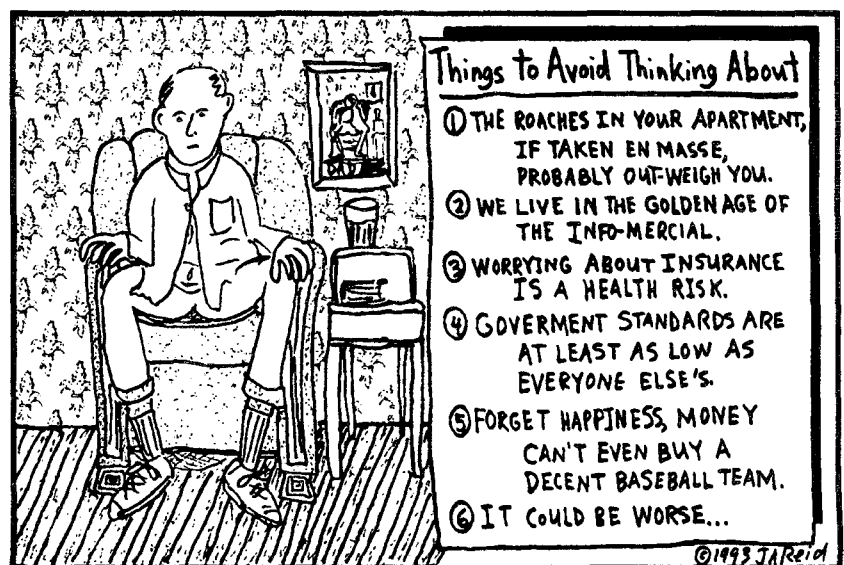
The fugitive businessman is assumed to have assets hidden somewhere that he has been able to exchange for cash. It would account for his ability, despite personal bankruptcy, to hire top legal talent for his defense, a public relations firm that was able to get cabinet ministers and MPs to intervene on his behalf, and the private planes with which to make his escape a few months ago.

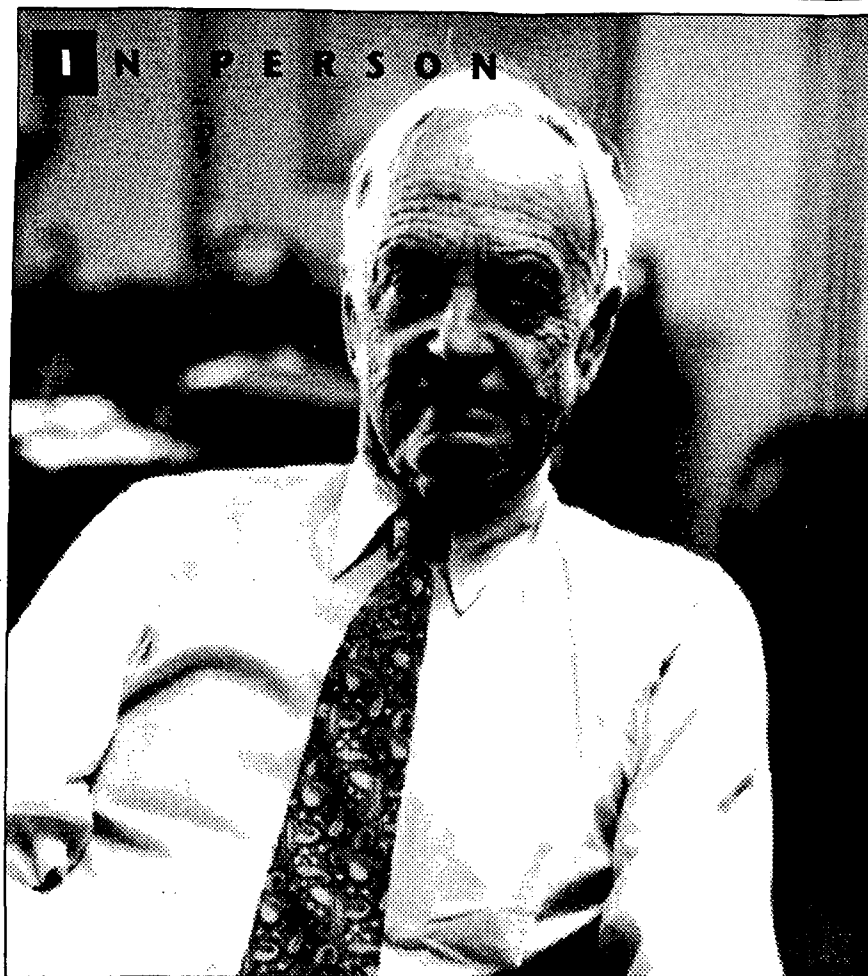
Polly Peck creditors are said to expect to get 15 to 30 pence to the pound; 20,000 stockholders, whose investment was once thought to be worth more than \$3 billion, are expected to get nothing. Last year, a group of American shareholders was awarded nearly \$10 million by a U.S. court in a lawsuit against Nadir, but the judgment in their favor seems all they are likely to get.

—A. Rice

ROUGH CUTS

By JA Reid





© David V. Andrews

JUDICIAL DISSENTER

*Whitman Knapp
protests the drug war*

At 84 years old, Judge Whitman Knapp of New York's Southern District Federal Court doesn't need to tap-dance around controversy. "The drug statute is absurd," he says, arguing that the Harrison Act of 1914 and subsequent drug laws

have visited on the American people a social evil that dwarfs Prohibition

.As a federal judge with senior status, Knapp is entitled by law to take on such work as he is "willing and able to perform." About one and a half years ago, says Knapp, he "took [his] name out of the wheel for drug cases." This spring, he and another senior-status federal judge who refuses to hear drug cases, Jack Weinstein of Brooklyn, went public.

In May, Newt Gingrich (R-GA), Henry Hyde (R-IL) and six other Republican congressmen sent Knapp a letter threatening to launch impeachment proceedings against him for "dereliction of judicial obligations." Knapp shot back a terse note directing their attention to the senior status statute.

A heavily credentialed Manhattanite whose name evokes memories of the Knapp Commission, which investigated police corruption in New York City in the early '70s, Knapp was appointed to the federal bench by Richard Nixon in 1972. He opted for senior status almost six years ago. He says that by 1974 he realized "nothing was happening" in the fight against drugs. He tells of a case tried before him involving a million-dollar-a-day heroin ring run out of

ETC.

By Miles Harvey

Putting which people first?

The Democrats held a forum on health care reform recently—but it wasn't one of those feel-good "town meetings" Bill Clinton likes to host. No, if you wanted to be at this "Issues forum" full of administration big-wigs, you would have had to cough up at least \$5,000 to the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. A health forum and a fundraiser, all in one? Well, why not? It's obvious to just about everyone in Washington that health industry money is behind Clinton's decision to go with a managed competition plan. Why not just be up-front about the extortion and soak the industry for all it's worth?

"The solicitation does not appear to violate restrictions on fund raising or lobbying," writes Robert A. Rosenblatt in the *Los Angeles Times*. "But it is clearly targeted at organizations and individuals whose economic interests could be strongly affected by details of the president's reform package and who might fear that they would be deprived of important information if they decline the invitation. ... The Democratic Party, which now controls the White House after an absence of 12 years, sees an opportunity to attract large sums of money from businesses and groups worried about the impact of health reform and other issues." And what about the mil-

lions of Americans simply worried about accessible and affordable health care? Sorry, no admittance.

Haiti stereotypes

The July 26 "Etc." column looked at the way the mainstream media treats Haiti's democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted in a September 1991 military coup. We found it strange that in several news accounts, reporters described Aristide—and not the military leaders who forced him from office—as "radical." We weren't the only ones.

In the July/August issue of *Report on the Americas*, a publication of the North American Congress on Latin America, Catherine Orenstein examines the media's coverage of Haiti. Her conclusion: "The media labels assigned to ousted President Aristide play heavily on North American stereotypes."

Aristide, she notes, has been called a "populist demagogue" by the *Los Angeles Times* and "a mix of Khomeini and Castro" by the *New York Times*. He also regularly gets labeled "leftist," "socialist" and "anti-American."

Orenstein discovered that "[d]uring the two-week period after the coup, the *New York Times* spent over three times as many column inches discussing Aristide's alleged transgressions than it spent reporting on the ongoing military repression."

As Orenstein explains: "In its coverage of Haiti, the mainstream media have essentially functioned as the public-relations arm of the U.S. State Department."

the Atlanta penitentiary. He wryly observes, "That certainly shows the value of putting people in jail."

For most of his time as an active judge, minimum-sentencing guidelines for drug offenders did not exist. "I didn't have to sentence minor players," he says. While he takes particular issue with the sentencing mandates—a severe punishment code for drug offenders instituted during the Reagan administration—he views as flawed the overall drug-control policy.

Knapp reasons—like drug-reform advocate and Nobel laureate Milton Friedman—that criminalizing drugs raises their market value, thereby increasing the supply—both of drugs and of those willing to sell them. He has likened prosecution of drug offenders to pulling minnows from a pond. And he recalls the government's propaganda during the Vietnam War. "We just kept on getting reports on how successful we were ... the body counts; it's the same thing we get now with the drug war."

Worse than ineffective, the drug war, he says, is "ruining our inner cities" and "devastating our judicial system" by swamping courts and swelling prisons. And he believes that strategy engenders another, less tangible ill: "Where you have a law that's generally ineffective, that has to undermine the respect for law in general."

Knapp, who came of age during Prohibition, points out that then, too, people routinely ignored the law. "It was exactly the same reason the drug laws are ineffective; it followed Friedman's formula," he says. And though Prohibition and drug policy do exactly the same thing, Prohibition required a constitutional amendment.

Nevertheless, if the effects of the policies are the same, then so might be the remedies. The 21st Amendment, says Knapp, simply made it no longer a federal crime to sell alcohol while including a provision making it illegal to import liquor into a state that prohibited it. He believes the current crisis demands similar medicine. "You just repeal the Harrison Act and its progeny, but you put in a law permitting the states to make their regulations."

He advises against worrying too much about what those regulations will be. "With Prohibition, they didn't have endless arguments about what was going to happen afterward; they just stopped it."

While some drug-war rhetoricians insist on a fundamental moral distinction between alcohol and controlled substances, Knapp doesn't buy it. "What's the moral difference between an alcoholic and a drug addict?" he asks. "That an alcoholic can get help without running the risk of going to jail. Addiction should not be a crime; it's a disease."

Not one to muse over the philosophical arguments for decriminalization, Knapp approaches the issue with the empirical understandings of one who has witnessed more than a third of U.S. history. He remembers going to concerts in the late '60s at Carnegie Hall and discovering that up in the balcony "it was a haze. All the kids were smoking it, and they don't seem to be a lost generation." Likewise, it doesn't bother him that George Washington may have smoked marijuana. "I don't know why he shouldn't if he wanted to," says Knapp.

Knapp considers Attorney General Janet Reno "the most hopeful sign I've seen in a long time," but he doesn't expect things to change any time soon.

"The American people for some reason have this feeling that you can make people behave by enacting laws," he says. "As long as we have the illusion that we can lick the problem just by bigger sentences and more interdiction, nobody's going to stop and figure out alternatives."

—David V. Andrews

THE FIRST STONE

FLACK ATTACK

By Joel Bleifuss

The Founding Fathers didn't have public relations (PR) firms like Hill and Knowlton to package their revolution. They wrote their own soundbites: "Give me liberty or give me death." Media events like the Boston Tea Party were carried off without the help of corporate sponsors such as Celestial Seasonings.

Today, something as momentous as a national revolution could not happen without an army of corporate PR mercenaries churning out the information and putting forward hired experts to shoot down opposing ideas.

The PR industry's influence—often overlooked as a force in U.S. politics—is as pervasive as it is pernicious. PR professionals, when in their groove as apologists for the corporate ideal, define the subject of public debates and then frame the limits on that debate. As media critic Morris Wolfe has observed, "It is easier and less costly to change the way people think about reality than it is to change reality."

Manipulating the public's perceptions of reality takes special skills. Younger professionals in the field of "communications" earn PR degrees from journalism schools. Others get their start in government service and then, contacts in hand, cash in their experience with a high-paying job in the PR industry. But what the best in the business have in common is that they have rotated through a revolving door of government, journalism and PR, until their identities and allegiances have been blurred beyond recognition.

The losers in this whole charade are the democratic process and those citizens still holding on to the notion that they can make a difference.

For the inside dope on the PR people who have real influence, forget the *New York Times*. What you need to read is *O'Dwyer's Public Relations Services Report*, the industry's trade journal. According to *O'Dwyer's*, the biggest PR campaign currently taking place in Washington revolves around the North American Free Trade Agreement

(NAFTA). The Mexican government and Mexican corporations have reportedly paid PR firms \$25 million to push for congressional passage of NAFTA—enough to elect several people to the U.S. Senate.

According to public opinion surveys, however, only 51 percent of the American public have heard of NAFTA. Obviously, the PR companies handling the Mexican account have chosen not to go "public" with their public relations. Last month *O'Dwyer's* reported, "We wonder if [the Mexicans] are getting their money's worth, or if some 'stealth' campaign is taking place. ... NAFTA lobbying firms, of course, say they have laid the groundwork for its passage by concentrating efforts on building congressional support rather than conducting a broad-based PR effort."

In some cases, propagandists must take the public into account. One of the most successful broad-based PR efforts of the '80s accompanied the Reagan administration's budget-busting military buildup. The growth in the Pentagon coffers under President Reagan went hand in hand with a blossoming Defense Department PR staff. By the time Reagan left office, 3,000 public relations officers were busy spending \$100 million annually to manipulate the public's perception of the military-industrial complex.

The high-hog living at the Pentagon has been replaced by leaner times, at least relatively. The 1993 Defense Department budget of \$278 billion is a little less bloated than the inflation-adjusted 1983 expenditure of \$291 billion. Consequently, military PR is more important than ever. As *O'Dwyer's* observes, "Over the next few years the Pentagon will be asked to take major 'hits' in its budget due to the end of the Cold War, putting pressure on military spokespeople to justify the need for costly programs."

But the Defense Department and the PR firms that represent the defense industry have come up with a program to deflect such "hits." *O'Dwyer's* reports: "A key weapon the military has in its arsenal is an intern program in which top military PR people learn the tricks of the trade at leading PR firms." In other words, the Pentagon PR flacks need some up-to-date techniques for congressional apple-polishing and public propagandizing. Which raises the question, who are these public servants really serving?

Mike Doble, an Army major who is chief spokesman for the Ballistic Missile Defense program—formerly known as Star Wars—is currently taking a 10-month sabbatical to work as an intern at Fleishman-Hillard, a leading PR firm. The major told *O'Dwyer's* that his goal is "to learn how pros at that firm get their message across for clients." No doubt, when Doble returns to the Pentagon he will have learned how to better serve his Star Wars clients like a real professional.

A number of firms are involved in the Pentagon's PR internship program, including the infamous Hill and Knowlton, which during the Gulf War operated as a White House annex. As was reported after the fact, Hill and Knowlton stoked the propaganda machine that sent U.S. soldiers to the Gulf. For its efforts, the company was paid \$10 million by the Kuwaiti royal family, whose younger members spent the war on the frontlines of Cairo discos.

The man in charge of the sheik's fifth column was Hill and Knowlton CEO Craig Fuller, friend and former chief of staff of President Bush. Fuller was appointed to his new Hill and Knowlton post the day before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait—coincidentally, of course. During the Gulf War, one of Hill and Knowlton's most deceitful PR coups was the congressional testimony by a young "war victim" who turned out to be a Washington resident, the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador. (Fuller is now the top flack at Phillip Morris, where he is promoting the fortunes of a real killer—the tobacco industry.)

Susan Trento—author of a book about Hill and Knowlton, *The Power House*—writes that in the Gulf War truth wasn't the only casualty. The integrity of constitutional government suffered a further blow. U.S. citizens learned, once again, to expect their government to deceive them. Trento writes, "Something has changed in Washington. Boundaries no longer exist. ... The triangle—the media, the government and the lobbying and PR firms—protect each other."

This potent mix is already scrambled in preparation for the national debate on Clinton's health care proposal. Last month, Jack O'Dwyer's *Newsletter* (another O'Dwyer publication) reported that the Health Insurance Association of America (HIAA), headed by former Ohio Republican Rep. Bill Gradison, is nearing a decision on which PR firm will be charged with telling the HIAA "how best to influence the debate on Capitol Hill." The job description also includes getting the proper spokespeople on morning network TV shows, *Crossfire*, *This Week with David Brinkley* and *Larry King Live*. Further, the association wants to attend "editorial board meetings" at the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

While the HIAA gets its act together, other corporate players in the health care debate have no doubt contracted to buy the cutting-edge tool of the PR industry, the video news release (VNR).

You've seen VNRs, but you just

don't know it. Earlier this year, David Lieberman reported in *TV Guide* that a Nielson Media Research survey of 92 TV newsrooms revealed that all use VNRs in their broadcasts, often passing off the VNR as independent reporting and not packaged PR. This raises troubling questions about the integrity of television news reporting—the primary source of news for more than 90 percent of the U.S. public.

VNRs even reach the lofty echelons of network news, where today's reporter can become tomorrow's flack. Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon write in *Unreliable Sources*, "On one video news release [produced by the American Chemical Society and broadcast on ABC], Sam Donaldson was heard introducing a segment on airport security systems that featured a new chemical-sensing device for detecting plastic explosives."

To get its VNR on a news network like ABC, the PR professional needs to know the right people. Marty Ofiara, a former TV news producer who works at KEF Media Associates, told O'Dwyer's, "We're finding it easier to place client VNRs with the major news feeds and networks because we know who our friends are within the news decision-making process."

Next issue: How the PR industry has co-opted grass-roots strategies, and plans that are in the works to fight the flacks.

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



ARMS CONTROL

War without end

P

atrick Blagden, a retired British brigadier general, keeps his collection of anti-personnel land mines in a plain metal cabinet in the corner of his office up in the Secretariat tower at United Nations headquarters.

Blagden, a six-footer with an erect military bearing, uses his cabinet of mines to illustrate his passionate view that the trade and production of land mines must eventually be abolished. "I'm not on a crusade here," he says, his voice rising. "But I am actually desperate."

Blagden—his official title at the U.N. is "de-mining expert"—is part of a new and growing international campaign to curb and eventually eliminate land mines. The campaign has drawn together an unlikely international band of allies—former military people, the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, the Arms

Project (a division of the well-known New York-based Human Rights Watch), environmental organizations, traditional peace groups and organizations that speak out for the handicapped.

The groups have good reason to be concerned. Though given sparse media coverage, the proliferation of anti-personnel land mines constitutes one of the most important arms-control issues of the post-Cold War era. An estimated 200 million of these mines—difficult to detect, dangerous and time-consuming to remove—are scattered across former and current conflict areas worldwide, according to a soon-to-be-released study by the Arms Project of Human Rights Watch. The study—a preliminary copy of which was made available to *In These Times*—reveals that 5-10 million of these weapons are being manufactured each year, a number 10 times greater than earlier estimates. Another organization estimates that 30,000 people are killed and wounded by such mines each year. Ninety percent of the victims are civilians.

Faced with such figures, the anti-land-mine coalition has had to organize quickly. In less than two years, the coalition has won a significant victory in the United States and successfully placed the issue on the international agenda.

In September 1992, the U.S. Congress passed a one-year moratorium on the export of land mines. That moratorium expires on October 23, but the legislation's sponsors, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL), hope to extend the ban for another three years. Tim Rieser, a staffer in Leahy's office, says more than 60 senators have already agreed to co-sponsor the bill, including Republicans Robert Dole and John McCain.

Rieser cautions that the prospects for passage, although excellent, are not assured. At least one American defense contractor, Alliant Techsystems of Edina, Minn., will try to modify the extension. (See accompanying article.) And the critical support of key Armed Services Committee members Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Strom Thurmond (R-SC) has still not been secured.

But the U.S. moratorium is only a small part of the solution. Although the United States was probably once the biggest producer of anti-personnel land mines, domestic production has fallen off—in part because of the slim profit margin on the simplest, low-tech mines. The biggest manufacturers today are China, the former Soviet Union and Italy, according to the Arms Project report, which contains the most comprehensive survey to date of world mine production. Project researchers found that at least 75 enterprises in 44 different countries are in the highly secretive business. And because the mines can be produced so cheaply (one the size of a hockey puck that can blow an adult's leg off or kill

The world's 200 million anti-personnel land mines are "weapons of mass destruction in slow motion."

By James North
UNITED NATIONS,
NEW YORK

Photographs by
Bobby Neel Adams

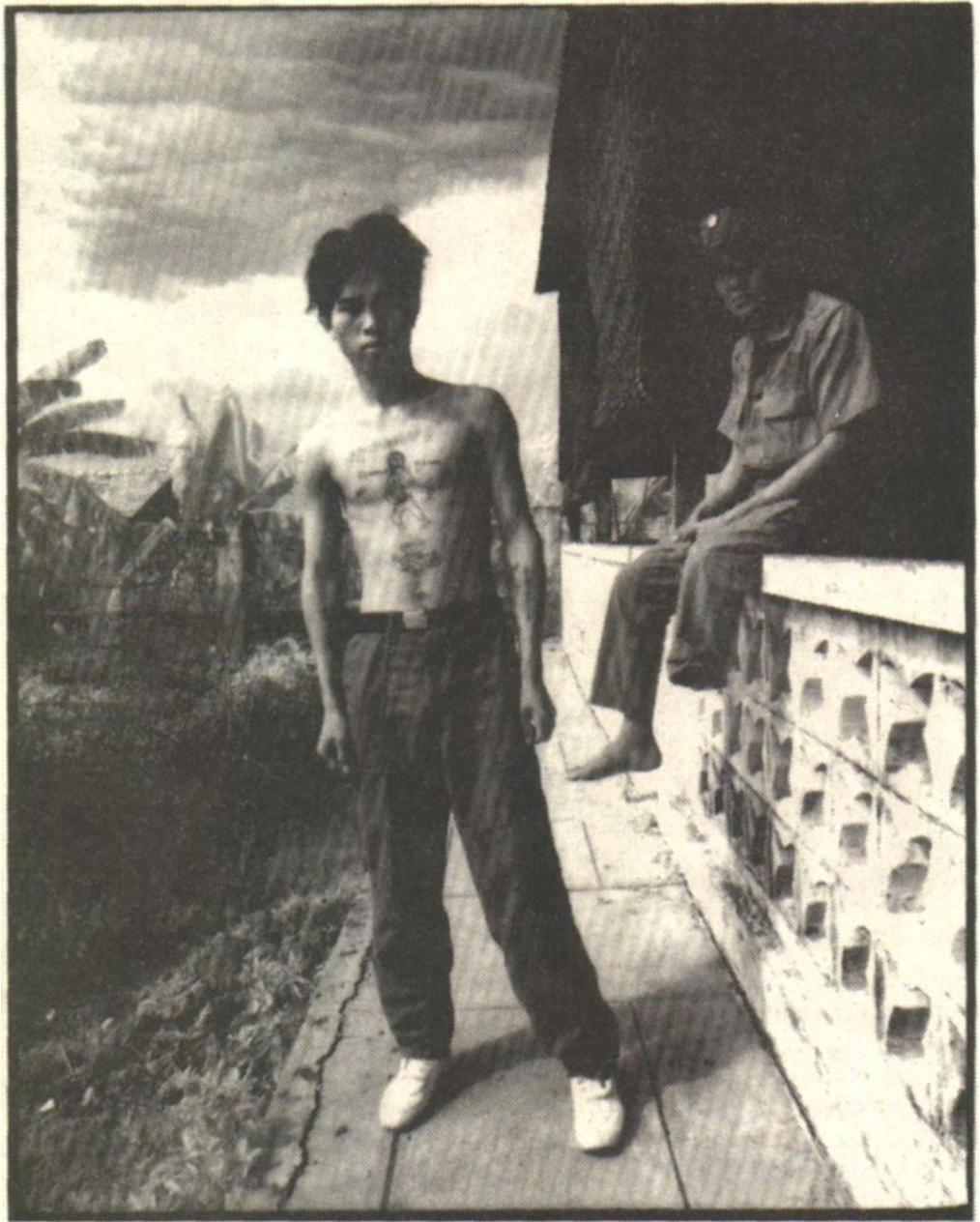
a child sells for as little as \$3.00), a total ban is still years, probably decades, off.

Most of the mines have been sown in Third World countries that have experienced insurgency/counterinsurgency wars: Cambodia, Afghanistan, Angola, northern Iraq (Kurdistan) and Mozambique.

The mine estimates are imprecise, but there is no doubt that the figure is relentlessly increasing. Some mines are now "scatterable," sown in enormous quantity by planes, helicopters or artillery. The Arms Project explains, "What might have taken a World War II battalion all day to emplace can now be done in minutes."

Mines have become weapons of choice in chronic low-intensity conflicts in the Third World. In conventional military doctrine, anti-personnel mines are defensive weapons, typically used to protect your own anti-tank minefields and slow down an invasion. But in irregular conflicts in the Third World, one or both sides may use anti-personnel mines to deny swaths of territory to the enemy, multiplying the strength of what may be relatively small forces. With estimates of more than two mines to every one of Angola's 9 million people, and almost as great a ratio in Afghanistan, the weapon has dramatically changed character. Arms Project Director Ken Anderson argues that mines have now become "weapons of mass destruction in slow motion."

Anti-personnel mines usually maim rather than kill people. (They are distinct from anti-tank mines, which are larger, much less common, and not the aim of the campaign.) Anti-personnel mines typically shred the lower limbs, causing terrible amputations, infections and other complications. "In the United States, the ratio of amputees to the general population is about one to 22,000," says Anderson. "In



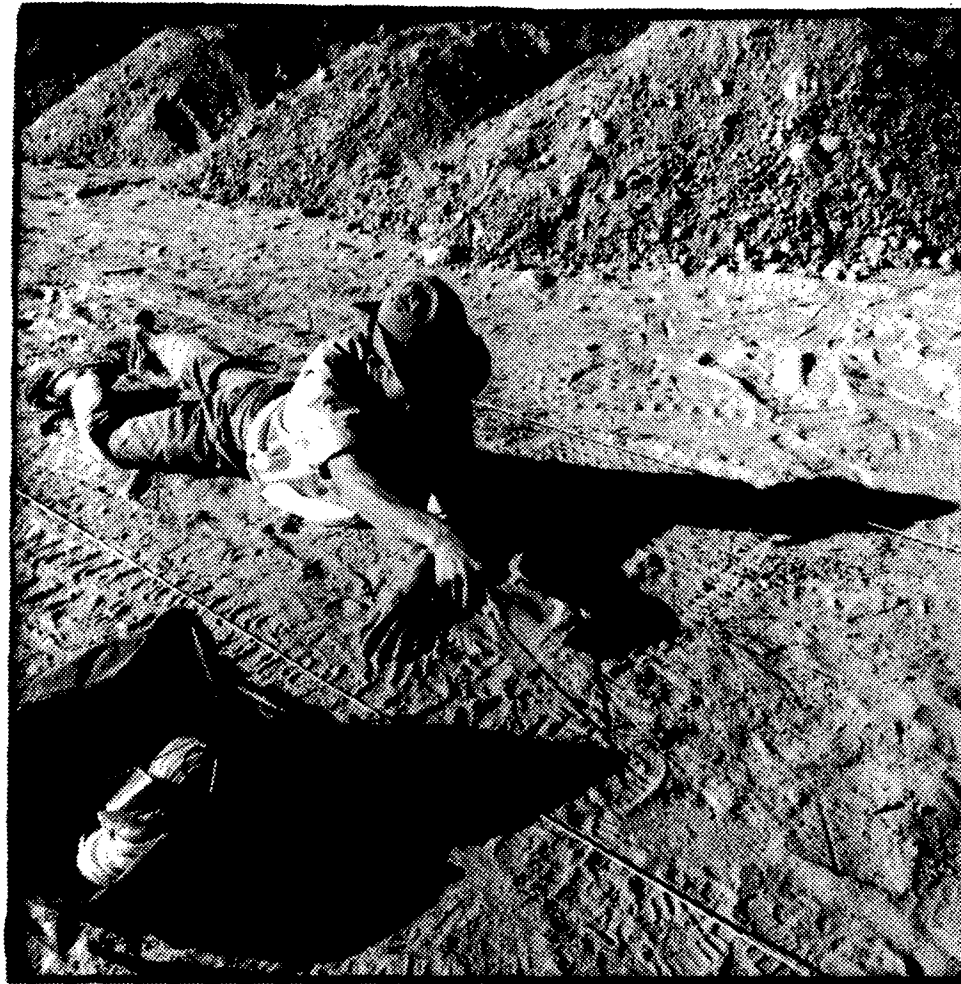
In Cambodia, one in every 236 people is an amputee—nearly a hundred times the U.S. rate.

Cambodia, it is one to 236."

Furthermore, such mines have become more difficult to detect. At U.N. headquarters recently, Gen. Blagden illustrates the point by striding over to his collection and, like a distinguished prosecutor producing a piece of evidence, pulls out what looked like two dark-green plastic yo-yos. "Soviet plastic, freely found in Cambodia," he says, gesturing to one. "And Chinese plastic, freely found in Cambodia."

He unscrews one of the yo-yos. "There are only two metal parts to this particular one—that pin ..." he points to a tiny bit of metal, "... and the detonator foil, a little metal capsule that's been removed for obvious reasons. There's not much metal here to be detected, especially when it's three or four inches down. Someone reckoned that this mine was about three and a half dollars a throw.

"This would probably cause a below-the-knee amputa-



A mine-clearing school in Cambodia. It takes 100 times more effort to remove a mine than to plant one.

den dismisses the reports. "This business is infested with snake-oil salesmen who have the answer to everything. In fact, almost no real research money has gone into minefield clearance."

De-mining is still a slow, painstaking, dangerous line of work. Armies are supposed to keep a record of where they plant mines, but the requirement is often ignored. The newer "scatterables," sown from the air, are impossible to track. "As Blagden explains, 'The people who are going to be killed or maimed are the innocent civilians. They don't have the maps; they don't have the clearance techniques; they don't even know what the mines look like.'"

Rae McGrath, also a retired British military man, is a co-founder of the Mines Advisory Group, a charitable organization based in Cumbria, England, that helps poor communities in the Third World clear mines from their fields and paths. McGrath estimates that the most mined countries, places like Kurdistan and Cambodia, may require "a decade

tion," he continues in a considered tone, "if you get the guy to the hospital in time. Remember that amputations are a function of time, as well as everything else."

From time to time, there are hopeful rumors of new technology that can quickly detect and clear mined areas. Blag-

den dismisses the reports. "This business is infested with snake-oil salesmen who have the answer to everything. In fact, almost no real research money has gone into minefield clearance."

The myth of self-destructing mines

At least one major U.S. military contractor, Alliant Techsystems of Edina, Minn., is opposing the Leahy/Evans effort to extend for three years the moratorium on the export of U.S. mines. In a position paper, Alliant agrees that "long-lasting anti-personnel land mines should be banned around the world."

But, the company contends, "mines with built-in self-destruct or self-neutralization features"—that is, mines that blow themselves up or shut off—should be exempted from the ban. Alliant claims that "all U.S. scatterable mines self-destruct or self-neutralize in a period of hours, days or, at most, a few weeks." Alliant is an October 1990 spin-off from the Honeywell Corp., which came under fire during the Vietnam War for its manufacture of anti-personnel cluster bombs.

Gen. Patrick Blagden of the United Nations refutes the concept of "self-destructing" mines by striding over to the green metal cabinet that contains his collection. He returns with a transparent plastic object, flat on one side, domed on the other. Circuit boards are visible inside. "This is the brain from a U.S.-made, 'self-destruct' mine," he says. "I think it was made by Honeywell."

He pauses. "You may ask, 'If they so successfully self-destruct, then how come I've got one?'"

Blagden's de-miners found 181 unexploded mines in southern Iran, two years after they were sown. "I don't know how many were originally sown, so I don't know the proportion that did self-destruct," he says. "But it certainly wasn't 99.99 percent."

"The moral of the story: If somebody is going to prove to me that there is going to be a 99.99 percent chance of self-destruction, then I am grudgingly going to say, 'OK, fine.' But until that time, no way."

—J.N

of work to clear the most important areas—that is, if there are funds available to do it. We could do a hundred times more work than we are doing at the moment. It's basically funds that limit what we can do."

The Mines Advisory Group does not do all the work itself. "We do bring in mine specialists and ordnance specialists," McGrath explains. "Our job is not so much to clear mines, although we do do that, as to establish an indigenous capability to clear mines—partly because it is such a long-term task."

Gen. Blagden, who travels frequently to the mined countries, has formed a succinct job description for the successful de-miner: "I want older men, family men, mature men. I want brave men, but I want men who know the risks, who will not drink excessively and who will get a good night's sleep, who will follow the plan. What I don't want are heroes, who will cut corners, try to do it their way."

But because it takes at least 100 times more effort to detect and defuse a mine than it takes to plant it, Blagden's mine-clearing efforts are ultimately just a stop-gap measure. The real solution to the problem would be a worldwide ban on production. And though the size and extent of the industry make that task difficult, anti-mine organizers are pleased at the progress so far.

Jody Williams of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, the group coordinating the effort in the U.S., says, "I've been stunned, quite honestly, by the momentum, by the number of organizations involved already. Worldwide, dozens of groups are already part of the effort."

Williams recently received word that UNICEF is joining the campaign because mines have such a negative impact on children.

The Mines Advisory Group has found that it must make special efforts to warn children in the mine-saturated countries in which it works. McGrath explains that in Kurdistan and Cambodia the organization has issued school exercise books with mine warning posters on the cover. "In almost every country you'll find children playing with mines," he says. "We've got photographs of Khmer children bowling

with mines. One of our people brought back a photo from Kurdistan of a kid playing with a truck he'd built—the two rear wheels of the truck are anti-personnel mines that somehow didn't go off."

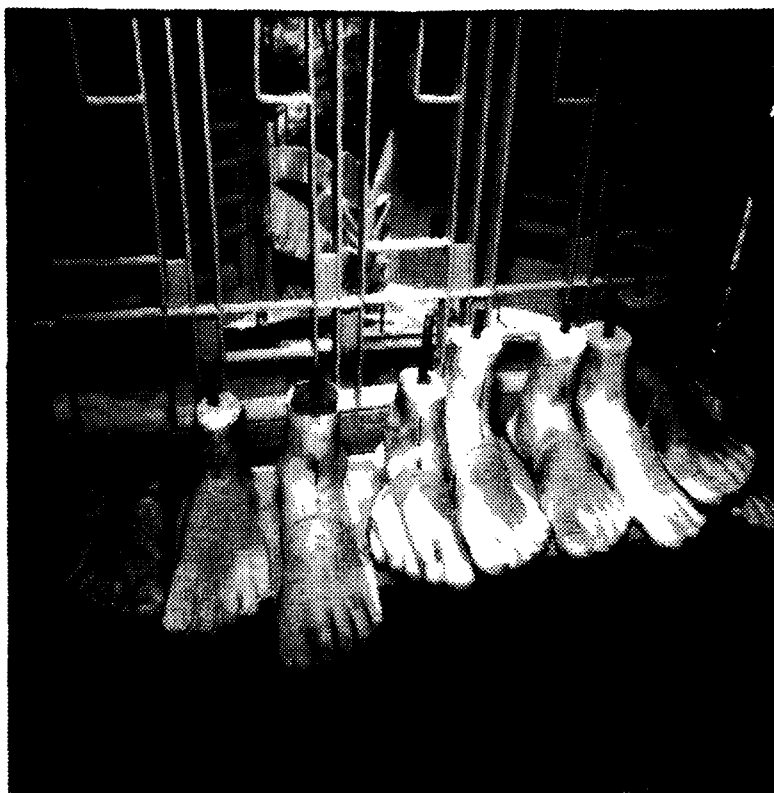
The group is getting more painfully explicit as it campaigns in the industrialized world. "We found that so many people were almost blasé about the pictures we showed them of children and women with neatly bandaged stumps," explains McGrath. "That, of course, isn't the story—you don't get a neatly bandaged stump from an anti-personnel mine. We started using as one of our major campaign 'graphics'—a horrible word, but—a picture of a child

from Afghanistan who was blown up by a fragmentation mine. Of course the child is just torn to pieces. It was taken just several minutes before the child died. It's a really horrific photograph.

"What was striking about the response we got was that some people said, 'This is disgraceful. You're abusing the child's right.' But what was very positive was the reaction of children to this photograph. When we have this poster on view, very often we get parents trying to pull their children away from the poster. But the children ... they're horrified by it; they're angered by it. They ask, 'Why did this happen? What was the child's name?'"

As another element in the campaign, the Mines Advisory Group wants to go to the courts and find a government or a mine manufacturer responsible for a specific death or injury. McGrath explains: "One of our guys de-mining in Kurdistan, a Kurd, was actually blown up by an Italian-made mine. He lost his foot. He'd come out of the minefield; he was resting; but we'd had three days of torrential rain. The topsoil moved, so this mine became active. Here we're in an unusual situation, because we can specifically say what happened, where it happened, and we can show very clearly that it was an Italian mine made by a specific company. We'll probably start with the European Court."

In his U.N. office, Gen. Blagden grows passionate on the

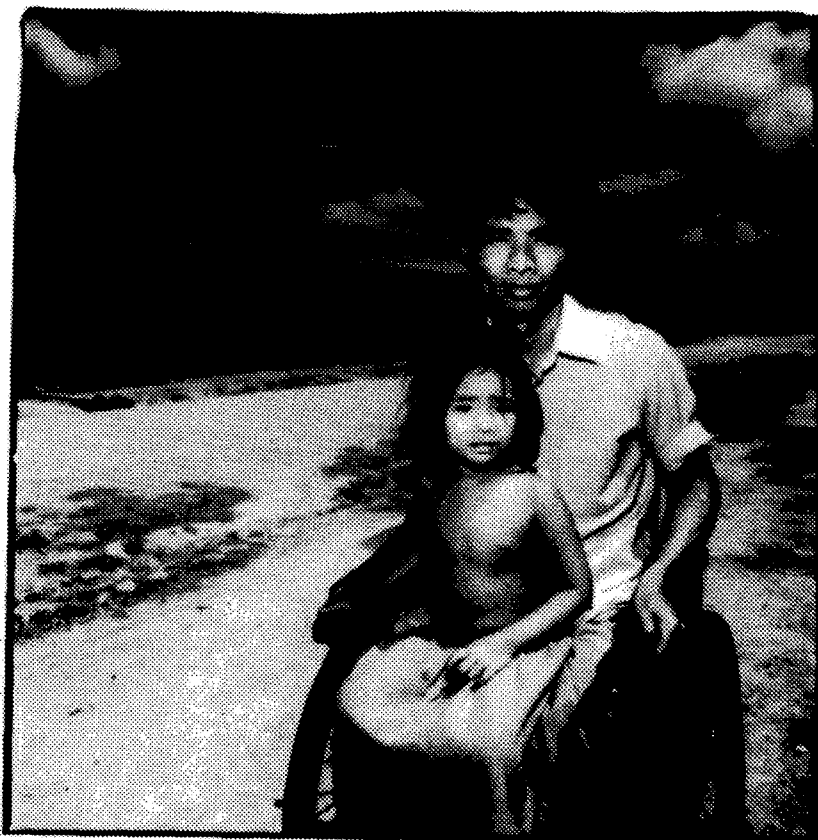


Prosthetic feet waiting for legs in Cambodia. Children there sometimes use live mines as toys.

A Cambodian mine victim,
Bim Seb, with his daughter.
Some 30,000 people worldwide
are killed or injured each year.

subject. "One gets terribly bound up in this—you just can't help it," he says. "I'm not intelligent enough to run a holy war, nor am I committed religiously in any particular direction so violently that it's become a crusade for me. But when you consider the damage that these bloody things do to the innocents, the civilians, the people who don't know any better and can't do any better, when you realize that the woods in Cambodia are stuffed full of mines and the people have to go in there because they're on a wood-based fuel economy ... so you get the women and children going in and trying to gather the firewood, and 'bang!' ... when you consider the enormous damage, sociological, economic, political and all the rest of it, done by these damn things, then I am bound to say that I am now committed to trying to get rid of them." ◀

James North writes regularly about the Third World for *In These Times*. Bobby Neel Adams is a freelance photographer living in San Francisco. He is currently working on a book of photographs about anti-personnel mines, for which he visited Cambodia in 1992.



This story was made possible by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Groups involved in the anti-mine movement include: Vietnam Veterans of America (2001 S Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009), the Arms Project of Human Rights Watch (485 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017) and the Mines Advisory Group (54a Main St., Cockermouth, Cumbria CA13 9LU, England).

United by pain

There is a poignant story behind the American participation in the anti-mine campaign. It began back in 1981, with the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. Bobby Muller, the foundation's energetic director, is a paraplegic, wounded (by a bullet) while serving as a Marine infantry officer in Vietnam.

In the early '80s, the foundation sponsored efforts to bring about reconciliation between the United States and Indochina. Muller remembers: "In 1981, I had the privilege to lead the first group of Vietnam veterans to go back to Vietnam. In 1984, I led the first vets delegation to Cambodia. In Cambodia, especially, you could not help but recognize the very extraordinary numbers of amputees."

The foundation set up a prosthetics program. "We found that the most suitable kind of limb was what's called the Jaipur limb, which came out of India," says Muller. "They are much less costly, made of locally available materials. We brought some of the best technicians we could find to Cambodia, set up a clinic and got them to train the Cambodians how to manufacture these limbs. Dealing in that clinic with hundreds and hundreds of amputees, we became much more sensitive to land mines."

Muller adds that even in the foundation's Washington, D.C., office, he is reminded regularly of the continuing pain of amputation. He explains, "Some of the guys I work with, Vietnam vets, are multiple amputees. The suffering that attends the traumatic amputations that land mines cause really is in a category by itself. Even myself, as a paraplegic, have not gone through what I've seen some of the amputees go through. The initial trauma, the numbers of operations, the phantom pains [pains felt in limbs that no longer exist] that can continue for many, many years. One of our guys here has lost both his legs, and he comes in some days and says, 'I didn't sleep all night—these pains are killing me.' "

—J.N.

MOVEMENT POLITICS

Bad chemistry

The grass-roots environmental movement is heading into one of its toughest fights—the upcoming reauthorization of the federal Superfund law—without an important ally.

It wasn't corporate polluters that put one of the nation's leading environmental groups out of business.

William K. Burke

After a decade of impressive accomplishments, the board of directors of the National Toxics Campaign Fund (NTCF) voted in the spring to dissolve the organization. Torn by fiscal woes and internal controversy over management practices, the NTCF spun off its major projects into separate organizations. Press releases vowed the new groups would continue the NTCF's work.

But despite these assurances, the demise of the NTCF is a major setback for the national anti-toxics movement. And the group's

demise was not caused by corporate polluters, but by the NTCF's inability to practice democracy within its own ranks.

John O'Connor founded the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards (the group's original name) in 1983 in a low-rent Boston office. His goal was to provide a national voice for the hundreds of small organizing efforts that were springing up in cities and towns poisoned by toxic waste. To bring these efforts together, the organization set up a board of directors composed of grass-roots leaders who met monthly to set policies and goals. By the time of the breakup, the organization had regional offices around the country and a nearly \$2 million annual budget.

Much of that growth was made possible by former NTCF Executive Director Gary Cohen, a friend of O'Connor's from their undergraduate days at Clark University. Cohen joined the group in 1986 as a grant writer and editor of NTCF publications. Cohen's fund-raising skills

allowed the organization to reach new levels of presence and power. But his inability to accept criticism was the primary reason the organization folded, according to critics.

The organization's ability to help toxic victims speak in a unified voice will be sorely missed. When O'Connor founded the organization in 1983, the Reagan administration was busily gutting the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) pollution-enforcement capability. The vaunted federal Superfund toxic waste cleanup program was proving ineffective. People trapped living next to toxic waste dumps and polluting facilities were isolated from the nation's centers of political and economic power.

Endless hours spent organizing and educating by the volunteers and staffers of the grass-roots anti-toxic movement—represented nationally by the NTCF and Lois Gibbs' Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste (CCHW)—have changed that bleak scenario. Congress included provisions proposed by O'Connor's organization in the 1986 Superfund Reauthorization Bill—making it one of the most powerful pieces of anti-pollution legislation ever passed. And the national coordination of grass-roots organizations made possible by the NTCF and CCHW prevented the law from being gutted by halfhearted EPA enforcement efforts and by sweetheart deals with polluters.

In Ponca City, Okla., then-NTCF Western Regional Director Adrienne Anderson helped organize resistance among people living in a neighborhood where carcinogenic

wastes from a Conoco refinery seeped through basement walls and filled the air. After a two-year fight, Ponca City residents forced Conoco to agree to pay \$23 million to buy out families living in 400 of the most contaminated homes. An NTCF affiliate in Alabama blocked Chemical Waste Management's plans to install a toxic waste incinerator at the company's Emelle, Ala., site, the largest toxic waste dump in the world.

Aside from assisting hundreds of isolated groups fighting to save themselves from the dangers of pollution, the NTCF also pioneered "good neighbor negotiations," in which community and regional anti-toxics groups work out agreements to inspect local factories and help implement pollution-prevention measures. And for the last five years, the NTCF's Citizens' Laboratory has helped level the environmental playing field by providing more than 500 grass-roots groups with chemical analysis of the toxics in their backyards and wells—at less than one-tenth the cost charged by commercial laboratories for similar tests.

NTCF founder O'Connor is assembling a new organization, called the Jobs and Environment Campaign (JEC). The JEC includes all of the NTCF's grass-roots organizers. The JEC will probably include a revived Citizens' Laboratory. O'Connor denies that the formation of the JEC means that the NTCF failed. "People say to me, 'John, we're sorry to hear the National Toxics Campaign dissolved.' That's not really accurate; what has happened is a reorganization.

"Our agenda is to continue the great work of the National Toxics Campaign, but we have to point out that pollution prevention is an economic agenda. We are reorganizing and keeping what made us special, the black organizers, the Indian organizers, the white working-class organizers," O'Connor says.

Adds Cohen: "The NTCF was a great incubator where creative people came together to propel the [grass-roots anti-toxics] movement." Cohen says the dissolution of the organization was a necessary, even a positive step. "When organizations that are set up to serve people can no longer do so they need to be swept aside so that other, more effective organizations can take their place."

Cohen points out that the NTCF's Environmental Justice Project, which trains organizers to work in minority communities, and its military toxics project have been spun off from the NTCF and will continue operations. "Dissolving NTCF and letting these organizations go their own way allowed the movement to be better served and concentrate resources more strategically," Cohen says.

But Cohen's critics from within the NTCF say his management style, and especially his efforts to use his allies on the organization's board of directors to silence criticism by board members Ernie Witt and Martha Bailey, were largely responsible for the organization's collapse.

As *In These Times* reported in its Oct. 28, 1992 issue, much of the antagonism between Cohen and the reformers centered around Adrienne Anderson, the organization's former Western regional director and arguably the NTCF's

most successful grass-roots campaigner. (Anderson's accomplishments, in fact, are so highly regarded that last spring Ralph Nader and Lois Gibbs inducted her into the CCHW's Grassroots Hall of Fame.) Anderson had accused Cohen of conflict of interest after he forced her out of the organization while at the same time pursuing a \$200,000 grant administered by former Colorado Public Health Director Thomas H. Vernon. Vernon was a longtime nemesis of the Denver-area grass-roots activists who had worked with Anderson. Cohen claims there was no *quid pro quo* connection between Anderson's departure and the grant, which the group was eventually awarded.

During the last year, Anderson and NTCF board members Witt and Bailey raised several other concerns about the NTCF management's integrity. The common thread of their complaints was that Cohen practiced favoritism to the point of discrimination—rewarding employees and board members who were blindly loyal to his policies while seeking to punish dissenters. Witt and Bailey were also attempting to force an investigation into staff claims that Cohen had mismanaged the organization's finances.

Bailey, a member of the NTCF board's finance committee, says she could not be sure of the depth of the organization's fiscal woes because Cohen would not provide her with financial reports. This past winter, Witt and Bailey wrote letters to the NTCF board of directors listing a number of problems they claimed had resulted from Cohen's management.

Witt and Bailey—fearing that the board's executive committee was too dominated by Cohen allies to give their concerns a fair hearing—requested that the executive committee be dissolved, Cohen fired and O'Connor called to account before the full board for failing to protect the organization's integrity.

Not surprisingly, the board's executive committee refused to take these steps. Instead, the committee asked everyone involved in the controversies to submit evidence concerning the NTCF's problems. Witt and Bailey dutifully submitted substantial documentation of the charges they felt warranted further investigation.

At a special meeting on March 23, the executive committee flatly refused all their requests for investigation. Instead, the committee turned around and slapped Bailey and Witt on the wrists—voting that the two had violated a rule forbidding members to speak to current or former NTCF employees who had a grievance or lawsuit pending with the organization.

This was a fatal decision. The March meeting turned out to be the organization's last real opportunity for getting its house in order. "If people had listened to the dissenters in the organization, I think the [NTCF] would still be strong," says Marco Kaltofen, former director of the NTCF Citizens' Laboratory.

Among the issues raised by Witt and Bailey and brushed aside by the executive committee:

- Allegations that Cohen had mismanaged grant money

earmarked for the Citizens' Laboratory. By the time the executive committee met in March, lab director Kaltofen had written two memos complaining that funds were missing from laboratory accounts and asking for access to information about the lab's finances. Cohen issued a reprimand to an NTCF secretary who gave Kaltofen information about the status of his lab's finances, according to a source within the office. Kaltofen eventually resigned from the NTCF. He says he believes that thousands of dollars may have been funneled from the lab into general organizational funds. "I was leaving because there was a clear decision not to make me part of the financial oversight of the lab. I found myself not able to assure funders that the money was going to the right place," Kaltofen says.

- A claim that Cohen had offered to raise funds so that Alabama organizer and NTCF executive committee member Kaye Kiker could hire additional staff after Cohen laid off Linda Wallace-Campbell, the NTCF's former Southern regional organizer, citing a lack of funds. *In These Times* has obtained a copy of a signed, handwritten memo from Cohen apparently written after Wallace-Campbell was laid off in which Cohen offers to raise funds to expand Kiker's office.

- Allegations that Cohen's management practices at times constituted race and sex discrimination. Among those making this claim was Wallace-Campbell, who has subsequently sued the NTCF for sexual discrimination. The case is still pending. Wallace-Campbell claimed she had been paid thousands of dollars per year less than male organizers hired after her. She earned \$22,000 per year at the time she was laid off in July 1991. An NTCF salary list for that year lists several male organizers hired after Wallace-Campbell earning higher salaries, including a male California organizer listed as making \$35,000.

- The claim that Cohen had served on an industry-affiliated group in violation of NTCF rules. Cohen had served on the Commission on Superfund—an organization heavily funded by industry—and attended a commission meeting that included Dean Buntrock, CEO of WMX (formerly Waste Management Inc.). Witt and Bailey claimed that Cohen's participation violated a 1989 board resolution barring NTCF officials from participating in any organization with representatives of Waste Management. WMX has long been one of the NTCF's most bitter foes in fights over communities poisoned by toxic waste landfills and incinerators. Cohen claims that the board approved his participation.

Cohen says that all complaints and charges of misconduct surrounding his management of the NTCF were groundless. Whatever their merit, Witt and Bailey's charges—while serious—seem hardly enough to cause the downfall of a nationally important organization with a wide base of support. That's why it sent shock waves through the organization when word of Cohen's intention to dissolve the NTCF leaked out just before the April board of directors meeting in Albuquerque.

"There were structural problems in the NTCF that were exacerbated by infighting and vindictiveness that made it no

longer viable," Cohen now says.

What Cohen sees as "structural problems," however, look to others like Cohen's ego problems. "I think Gary Cohen had trouble taking leadership from poor and working people," O'Connor now says. "When I was executive director of the National Toxics Campaign, Martha Bailey and Ernie Witt tried to fire me four or five times." Under the NTCF system, which ostensibly stressed democracy and grass-roots participation, that was their right.

At the Albuquerque meeting, Cohen and his allies pushed through a vote to dissolve the NTCF. The vote came despite the wishes of O'Connor, who says he wanted to break the group into two separate entities rather than to dissolve. "Throwing away over 10 years of work in over a thousand communities should not be taken lightly," he wrote in a seven-page resignation letter—titled "A Plan to Prevent the Dissolution of the NTCF"—distributed before the meeting.

O'Connor was not the only one trying to save the group. Witt circulated a platform he and Bailey had drafted for reforming the NTCF. It called for Cohen's ouster and a renewed investigation into problems in the organization. Bailey, who was not at the meeting due to her terminal breast cancer, had not been permitted to send an alternate to Albuquerque to vote in her place. At every previous NTCF board meeting, however, alternates had been allowed to represent and vote on behalf of board members who could not travel.

Cohen had the power to shut down the NTCF because the organization had become dependent on his fund-raising skills. A huge percentage of the NTCF's \$2 million annual budget was funded by foundation grants Cohen solicited. As O'Connor explains: "The reason the board of directors decided to dissolve was that Gary Cohen came into the Albuquerque meeting and told us he had decided not to raise money for the NTCF anymore because he thought it was immoral because of the conflict within the organization." Cohen declined to reply to O'Connor's comments, but pointed out that the NTCF's entire People of Color Caucus, including Witt, voted to dissolve the organization upon hearing his arguments in favor of the decision.

Employees who reported to the NTCF's Boston offices on Monday May 10 found that the organization's files, financial records, office furniture and computers had disappeared. NTCF's management had not paid rent on the Boston office and the Citizens' Laboratory was about to be evicted. O'Connor wrote a personal check to cover the back rent so that the expensive analytical equipment remaining in the lab would have an interim home.

The grass-roots anti-toxic movement will outgrow the bitterness that now pollutes the NTCF's legacy. But it also seems clear that, as an organization dedicated to forcing America to face some of its ugliest truths, the NTCF failed the test of facing the truth about itself.

William K. Burke writes regularly about environmental issues for *In These Times*.

THE ECONOMY

Trading places

Clinton, who promised a new trading strategy toward Japan, has reverted to the failed policies of Reagan and Bush.

By John B. Judis
WASHINGTON D.C.

This fall, Congress and the administration will be focused on reforming health care and ratifying the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Both are important, but what the Clinton administration does about U.S.-Japan relations will have more effect on Americans' standard of living than either NAFTA or national health insurance.

Japan's trade surplus with the U.S. has steadily risen over the last year and a half. In July, it increased by 23 percent to \$4.7 billion, concentrated disproportionately in manufacturing. This surplus, which may exceed \$50 billion this year, directly threatens American jobs. According to U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor, each \$1 billion costs 19,000 jobs—or almost 1 million total jobs.

At \$12 billion for July, Japan's overall trade sur-

plus is also destabilizing the world economy. Achieved in part by restricting imports and domestic consumption, it creates an excess of global supply over demand.

In his first months in office, Bill Clinton promised to attack the trade surplus. After a meeting last April with Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, Clinton said, "I am particularly concerned about Japan's growing global trade surpluses and deeply concerned about the inadequate market access for American firms, products and investors in Japan. America is accepting the challenge of change and so, too, must Japan."

But Clinton has not followed through on this promise. Instead, he has ended up pursuing timid and self-defeating policies very similar to those of the Reagan and Bush administrations.

The Reagan administration attempted to reduce the surplus with Japan primarily by pressuring Tokyo to raise the value of the yen in relation to the dollar—which was supposed to make Japanese exports more expensive in the U.S. and American exports

cheaper in Japan. The Bush administration talked up the yen, but it also pressured the Japanese to deregulate their economy by breaking up cartels and eliminating government subsidies to industry.

These strategies did not work. Japanese officials repeatedly (and predictably) ignored the Bush administration's demands to "Americanize" their economy. The U.S. can hardly expect other countries to model their economies on our own—especially when our own has not performed that well.

Devaluation had at best a marginal effect on imports and exports. Japanese consumer electronics firms have not had to worry about price competition from American firms, and in other industries, like auto, the Japanese kept their prices low abroad while maintaining informal import barriers at home.

And devaluation has had its down side. By lowering the value of its currency, the U.S. has reduced its international purchasing power and its citizens' relative standard of living. It has also made its own assets less valuable. Eventually, devaluation can lead to currency crises, as other nations attempt to cash in their dollars. Governments will be forced to buy back their own currency and to raise interest rates to attract foreign currency.

Upon taking office, the Clinton administration appeared ready to adopt a different trade strategy. Clinton appointed economist Laura Tyson, a critic of the Bush-Reagan trade strategies, as chair of the Council of Economic Advisers. She advocates reducing the trade surplus through managed trade—using economic sanctions to force Japan to meet specific numerical guidelines for opening its market to foreign goods. Tyson's model is the semiconductor agreement—negotiated under protest by the

Reagan and Bush administrations—which granted foreign firms 20 percent of the Japanese market.

Tyson's managed trade strategy allows the U.S. to attack not only the size but the composition of Japan's trade surplus, which is concentrated in high value-added manufacturing. It's more important to open Japan's market to American supercomputers than to American rice or apples.

Both Clinton and Kantor endorsed managed trade. Clinton told an interviewer last spring, "I'm concerned not only about how much we sell but about what we sell. I would like to have a focus on specific sectors of the economy, and I would like to obviously have specific results."

The strategy initially worked. In the spring, the Japanese, fearing sanctions from the Clinton administration, announced that semiconductor imports had finally exceeded 20 percent. American negotiators then demanded that Japan agree to a 33 percent overall increase in imports over the next three years.

But as Tyson and Kantor were promoting managed trade, Clinton Treasury officials were undermining this new approach, championing the old strategy of currency devaluation and macroeconomic adjustment. Last spring, Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen and Undersecretary Lawrence Summers began calling on the Japanese to raise the value of the yen, and Clinton publicly urged revaluation, sending currency traders scurrying to their computers.

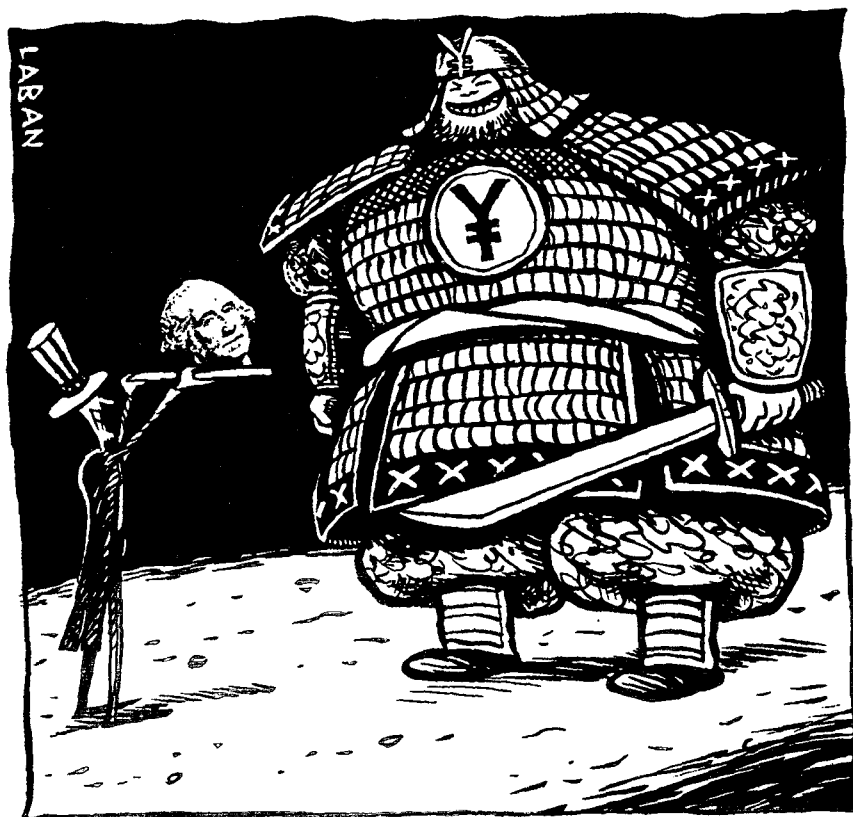
This strategy worked no better under Clinton than it had under Reagan and Bush. The yen has risen sharply, but so has the U.S. trade deficit with Japan. The growing trade deficit has put further downward pressure on the dollar, setting the stage for a currency crisis.

When I interviewed Tyson last May, she insisted that the administration had not abandoned managed trade, but was pursuing a two-track approach to reducing the surplus. Yet the administration, faced with stiff Japanese opposition to managed trade, also began to back away from specific numerical targets.

The first to go was the semiconductor agreement. After the Japanese reached 20 percent, Kantor announced that the administration no longer needed to insist on that numerical target. As if on cue, semiconductor imports have now dropped below 20 percent.

At the July economic summit in Tokyo, administration negotiators, facing stiff Japanese resistance and eager for political success at home, signed a meaningless "framework" agreement that both sides could interpret as they pleased.

The currency traders, however, understood the real



meaning of the agreement. The day after its announcement, the dollar fell against the yen.

Last month, as the dollar hit a record low in relation to the yen, the Clinton administration found itself on the verge of a currency crisis. The Treasury Department was forced to defend the dollar by buying up dollars. If that hadn't raised the dollar's value, the Federal Reserve might have had to raise interest rates, threatening the fragile economic recovery.

It was a sure sign that the devaluation strategy had once again gone awry. But instead of acknowledging this, the administration hinted that its intervention to prop up the dollar was in exchange for Japan's agreement to stimulate its economy. Having tried Reagan-style currency devaluation, the Clinton administration is now betting on Bush's strategy of demanding macroeconomic adjustment.

The president has failed to develop a viable trade strategy for the same reasons he has failed to secure a budget that "puts people first." Faced with strong opposition, whether on Capitol Hill or in Tokyo, Clinton invariably backs down. Three months after he announced his managed trade strategy, he gave it up, much the same way that under political pressure he gave up his "investment budget."

Clinton's abandonment of managed trade has also been abetted by officials in the Treasury and National Economic Council who were never comfortable with a managed trade strategy. Bentsen and Summers are now in control of American trade policy, not Tyson and Kantor. Under their leadership, Clinton, who ran as an agent of change, has once again embraced the ruinous status quo.

POLITICS

Run for the border

Even with its side agreements, NAFTA means that U.S. jobs and the Democrats' future prospects are both heading south.

By David Moberg

B

ill Clinton's choice of a salesman for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) gives a clue as to why the Democrats are in trouble. It also demonstrates why Clinton embraces an agreement hurriedly negotiated for George Bush's re-election campaign.

Lawyer William Daley is the Chicago mayor's brother, but above all he is a high-stakes fund-raiser for the Democratic Party. Implicitly or explicitly, Daley will convey the message to wavering members of Congress: big corporate political money is behind NAFTA; ignore it at your peril.

Nonetheless, both the core of the Democratic Party and much of the country as a whole oppose the Canadian-Mexican-U.S. trade pact. Some polls show

half of all Americans don't know what to think about it, and the remainder are about evenly split. Presented with arguments pro and con in a mid-July Gallup poll, nearly two-thirds of the respondents nixed NAFTA.

On most trade issues, only the Washington lobbyists and corporate money are relevant, but "this is an issue where members of Congress are listening to what people have to say at home," argues former Rep. Jim Jontz, head of the anti-NAFTA Citizens Trade Campaign.

To placate core Democrats, Clinton had promised during the campaign to deal with shortcomings in NAFTA by negotiating labor, environment and agricultural "side" agreements to supplement the original pact. Farmers were soon dropped altogether. Now the labor and environment side agreements have been revealed to have no teeth. They barely have gums. The labor agreements even retreat from protections under current trade law.

The side agreements are important because there is widespread fear that

U.S. firms will take advantage of NAFTA to shift investment south of the border, exploiting workers and ravaging the environment in Mexico while leaving U.S. workers without jobs. The record of U.S. firms along the border in the *maquiladora* factories, where workers typically make \$1.60 an hour and the environment has become what the American Medical Association describes as a "cesspool," gives ample grounds for concern.

More ominously, the corporate threat of moving jobs, as well as NAFTA's rules prohibiting trade barriers, may be used to drive down wages and weaken environmental protection in the United States. In a *Wall Street Journal* poll, 55 percent of corporate respondents said NAFTA would probably lead them to shift investment to Mexico and 25 percent said they'd use it to push wages downward in the United States.

Many smaller businesses are anxious about the potential impact of NAFTA. "No question about it, we'll be affected," says Joan Wrenn, co-owner of Hudson Screw Machine Products, an 87-year-old precision metalworking firm that employs 100 people in Chicago. "My husband tells my son to learn Spanish and to expect to spend part of the year south of the border. If we could divide the skilled and semi-skilled work, it would be to our advantage to move the semi-skilled part." Ironically, many of the displaced workers may be Mexican-Americans: about 40 percent of Chicago's Latino community work in factories.

The side agreements on labor and the environment do nothing to establish elevated standards common to all three nations. Instead, they focus only on assuring the enforcement of domestic laws in the three countries. They also do nothing to address the dozens of flaws labor and environmental groups found in the Bush NAFTA. Indeed, despite some reassuring general language, many environmentalists fear that under NAFTA environmental regulations could be challenged as trade barriers. In addition, businesses and politicians are likely to use growing competition for jobs as a rationale to weaken environmental standards.

The side agreements are not meant to address specific violations of either national labor or environmental laws, but rather the second-order question of whether a country "persistently" fails to enforce those laws. To do so, the side agreements establish a complex procedure with no mandate to act, no subpoena powers and no obligation for countries to provide information. If two of the three labor or environmental ministers on each tri-national council established by the side accords agree, they can set up an expert panel to rule on a case. Then, if there's no agreement on an "action plan" to remedy the problem, the expert panel could assess a fine. Only if the country at fault fails to pay the fine or continues not to enforce the law do the side agreements provide for trade sanctions.

This procedure will be ineffective partly because there are no trade penalties for offending companies or industries for their specific violations. It is also very unlikely that countries will resort to any meaningful penalties against each other. In any case, requiring "persistent" patterns of failure to enforce sets an extremely high threshold for action.

The labor agreement is even weaker than the environmental accord. The preamble commits all three parties to uphold the right to form unions, to bargain and to strike. Yet the weak enforcement mechanism applies only to persistent failure to enforce laws on health and safety, child labor and minimum wages. This leaves out the heart of labor rights, which have been suppressed as a matter of national economic policy in Mexico and, to a lesser extent, in the United States.

The Mexican government itself, whose long-dominant party also controls most of the unions, makes it difficult to form independent unions and has repeatedly intervened in recent years to break strikes and to depress wages. Through this labor side agreement, Clinton "has given the U.S. government imprimatur of approval to a Mexican labor relations system that continues the abuse of worker rights in Mexico," argues Jerome Levinson, former general counsel to the Inter-American Development Bank.

Indeed, the side agreements take precedence over existing trade laws, such as the Generalized System of Preferences, the Caribbean Basin Initiative and the 1988 Trade Act—all of which permit punitive trade and investment sanctions when international labor rights are violated. "Instead of being an historic step forward, it's a substantial step backward from the enforcement power currently

available," argues AFL-CIO trade economist Mark Anderson. U.S. companies also don't want anyone—like Canadian unions—demanding enforcement here of U.S. domestic labor law or a higher international standard, Anderson observes.

There is no need for a "property" side agreement, since unlike labor, protection of corporate and private property interests is the heart of NAFTA. The weak labor enforcement—and total avoidance of key labor rights issues—stand in dramatic contrast to the protection of intellectual property rights, such as patents and copyrights. NAFTA sets new international standards of protection and does not rely on enforcement of domestic law. And rather than show a persistent pattern of failed enforcement, a U.S. multinational only needs to show one infraction by a Mexican company.

"If a company hires children or dumps toxic wastes," Economic Policy Institute economist Thea Lee notes, "I have to show it happened many times and that it hurt my ability to compete." But if there is a single copyright violation of a videocassette, for example, NAFTA can be invoked to stop goods at the border, confiscate the tapes and even the factory without compensation, force compensation for lost profits, and get reimbursement of legal fees.

A newly proposed bank to clean up water pollution on the border falls far short of what is needed. It has no clear funding, such as a tax on U.S.-Mexican trade, and it fails to cover all of the environmental problems on the border or any that may develop in the rest of Mexico. Further, the proposal completely ignores the damage NAFTA could do to the complex U.S.-Canada agreements to protect the Great Lakes basin.

Ironically, the weak labor agreement undermines the argument that NAFTA will create jobs in the United States. With weak unions, Mexican wages and buying power will remain depressed. Although Mexican President Carlos Salinas promised a higher minimum wage, it was a vague commitment, not systematically tied to productivity and soon to be eroded by a likely devaluation of the overvalued peso.

NAFTA proponents assume that the current U.S. trade surplus with Mexico will continue to grow for many years. Yet the surplus, which represents a return to patterns that prevailed before the debt crisis in the early '80s, is already diminishing. With devaluation of the peso, the balance is likely to shift even more toward export to the United States as Mexican production costs and buying power both drop. The upshot would be job losses in the United States.

Clinton had a chance to refashion NAFTA into an agreement that would have strengthened rights and raised incomes for workers and set new standards for environmental protection across the continent. Over the long term, that would have also improved prospects for jobs in all three countries. NAFTA, even with the new side accords, remains a triumph for corporate interests. If U.S. job growth remains weak, NAFTA will politically haunt Clinton and the Democrats who support it for years to come. ◀

VIEWPOINT

Deficit fever

By David Wrenn

Americans have been conned into believing that reducing the federal budget deficit is necessary for the nation's well-being. Even in the face of the devastating Midwest floods, politicians and the media tell us that we cannot adequately help the victims because to do so would increase the deficit. Thus, in the midst of a propaganda blitz unmatched since the Persian Gulf War, the austerity cops have the day.

As politicians on both sides of the aisle squeeze working Americans, they invoke the nation's children—the true victims, they say, of the federal debt and budget deficits. In the words of Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-GA), U.S. disaster relief is “just one more example of borrowing on our children, borrowing on our grandchildren.”

But no matter how hard our leaders work to convince us that they are merely responding to the popular will, this is no grass-roots movement. Indeed, the reverse is true: private financial interests are the engine behind the cry for deficit reduction.

As William Greider wrote in *Who Will Tell the People*, “An elite consensus of opinion leaders from both political parties—economic policy gurus, financial and business leaders, strategy lobbyists and, more discreet-

ly, some prominent politicians” developed an agenda for Reagan's successor in 1988. The next president, Greider explained, was to “cut the budget deficit and the trade deficit by first slowing the economy and suppressing personal consumption, perhaps even accepting a recession.”

This could be accomplished “by raising taxes on consumption—on gasoline and other staples—as well as by cutting back on government benefits such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, assistance to veterans and civil-service and military retirement.”

The most influential (and most radical) articulation of this case, Greider noted, came in a 1987 *Atlantic* article, “The Morning After,” by a Republican investment banker, Peter G. Peterson. Peterson, who served as secretary of commerce in the Nixon administration, “delivered a scary sermon on what would unfold if Americans did not swiftly rediscover self-discipline. His painful remedies, however, were entirely directed at the population at large, while shielding his own class, the wealth holders, from sacrifice.”

As Greider observes, Fed chairman Alan Greenspan embraced this economic strategy, and in the summer of 1988 the Federal Reserve “initiated its own campaign to discourage con-

sumption—by raising interest rates and retarding the pace of economic growth.” Today Peterson's legacy can be found in media-darlings Lead or Leave, an anti-deficit campaign for twentysomethings that sports a pathetically low membership—despite Ross Perot seed money and corporate media plaudits. A new offshoot of the group, Third Millennium, with a multitudinous membership of 40, according to National Public Radio, was recently featured in *Time*.

Lead or Leave and its ilk assail the nation's elderly, averring that Social Security is responsible for the federal debt. This claim, of course, is preposterous: Social Security expenditures and contributions should not be counted as part of the federal budget; they weren't counted as such until the Johnson administration decided the Social Security trust fund surplus could partly offset the costs of the Vietnam War. Ironically, the government now utilizes the Social Security surplus to finance its debt.

Another favorite target of the austerity cops is Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). But the costs of this program take up only about 1 percent of the federal budget, and two-thirds of the beneficiaries of AFDC are children. Meanwhile, the Clinton administration has left intact costly weapons programs and even has proposed increasing the budget of the CIA.

We have a host of financial interests lobbying for deficit reduction and engendering “populist” backlash against deficit spending. Clinton's problem—in addition to instinctively eschewing any drift from conventional wisdom—is that he received a hefty pile of money from Wall Street during his presidential election campaign—and he's going to do exactly what his benefactors tell him to do.

Why do financial interests want the federal debt to be retired? According to Ralph Estes, professor of accounting

at American University and author of *Who Pays? Who Profits?: The Truth about the American Tax System*, the government actually nets an annual profit of \$120 billion from the debt because the payments are made in cheaper dollars than the dollars borrowed—which drives down bondholders' profits. Thus, the quicker the debt is retired, the better for the bondholders and for Wall Street.

Estes also observes that the savings and loan bailout costs about \$100 billion a year. Fifty-two percent of the bailout money goes to Texas—home of many deficit hawks, including Secretary of the Treasury Lloyd Bentsen, who bears much of the responsibility for the S&L scandal in the first place.

Wall Street would much prefer that the deficit be reduced while the economy is stagnant—hence the opposition to any meaningful economic stimulus package. Japan—with a smaller economy and, like many nations, with a much larger debt as a portion of its gross national product (GNP) than the U.S.—recently announced a \$117 billion stimulus package.

It's rarely ever explained exactly *why* we should quake in fear of the deficit. If you ask a Perot votary to explain why deficits are detrimental to the economy, he will rejoin, "Because Perot said so!"

The deficit hawks—when they actually try to proffer a rational explanation for their position—posit that the debt and deficits raise interest rates, which in turn constrict private investment; not surprisingly, no evidence is ever offered to support this notion. The vacuity of this position is evinced in the historical trends; for instance, from World War II to 1951, when the federal debt was at its peak (about three times what it is now, as a percentage of GNP), interest rates were at 2 percent. In fact, numerous studies conclude that higher government spending, with its attendant increase in consumer spending, spurs private investment.

And why invest in order to expand industrial capacity when we aren't using all we have? Currently, only

about 80 percent of U.S. industrial capacity is being used. The real problem is the paucity of consumer demand caused by unemployment and falling incomes. Firms won't increase output unless they believe their products will be purchased. But correcting that problem could be inflationary, and Wall Street won't stand for that.

What will be the denouement of the deficit fury? Continued economic stagnation. According to Gar Alperovitz, author of *Rebuilding America* and president of the National Center for Economic Alternatives, any program to reduce the deficit, with its concomitant withdrawal of government support and stimulus, will hold down economic growth and result in further economic atrophy. Alperovitz likens Clinton's deficit-reducing budgetary concepts to those of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover.

Historically, decreases in government spending have slowed the economy. Likewise, all periods of extended economic growth have been associated with high levels of government spending. We got out of the Great Depression through increased government spending (on the New Deal and World War II). Roosevelt's biggest economic mistake came when—in keeping with a campaign promise—he tried to balance the budget in his second term, sending the economy slumping back into depression. Economist Robert Eisner, author of *How Real Is the Federal Deficit?*, studied deficits and changes in GNP from 1956 through 1985 and found that the higher the deficit, the more potent the subsequent growth in GNP.

Ironically, the Clinton economic plan, by cutting too drastically, may actually *increase* the deficit, in addition to causing more stagnation. The deflationary effects of the plan could result in more unemployment and, in turn, falling tax revenues.

There are also problems with the way the government keeps its books. Eisner says that "the U.S. federal budget and the deficit are calculated in a way that would send chills up the spine of almost any sensible private

business accountant." Diverging from conventional accounting practices, the government doesn't distinguish between spending on investment and spending on day-to-day expenses.

Alperovitz argues that if the government used standard bookkeeping, the deficit would evaporate. He cites a study showing that the government actually ran a surplus of \$25 billion in 1990. Eisner blames the recession of 1981-82—the worst since the Great Depression—on a real budget *surplus* in 1980, along with a tight money supply. His analyses also show that the government *usually* runs a surplus. Also, the government does not take into account the appreciating value of its holdings. The government—the public—owns one-fourth of U.S. territory and owns mineral rights to another fourth; the annual appreciation of these holdings could more than offset increases in spending.

The debt and deficit that have so many incensed are the stuff of myth and churlish accounting. Because of the miasma all the nonsense about the deficit has generated, politicians won't even discuss, much less consider, the necessary economic remedy—namely, an increase in government spending on social needs.

David Wrenn is a writer in Norman, Okla.

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IN THE ARTS

The rifleperson

W

hen *Unforgiven* became a hit a year ago, trend-watchers eagerly heralded a revival of the Western. And although Clint Eastwood's rigorous revisionist take deserved the attention it got, the notion of a flood of far less thoughtful revivals (remember *Young Guns*?) was not necessarily heartening.

In The Ballad of Little Jo, a cowboy/cowgirl follows that lonely trail around the gender bend.

By Pat Aufderheide

But now here comes Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo*, a film good enough at its core to compensate for its flaws of execution. Human-sized but not a "small film," it's deliberately not epic in anything but the extravagantly excessive scenery of mountainous Montana.

The plot sounds like a paragon of political correctness: the West seen from the viewpoint of the Other. In fact, of several Others. The principal one is Jo Monaghan (Suzy Amis), a society girl turned unwed moth-

er and then rejected daughter. After being kicked out by a cruel dad and leaving her child with her sister, she adopts a male disguise to save her life after a brutal initiation to the West. They call her Little Jo in the plug-ugly mining camp where she turns up. (All of this—but little more—is known about the real Jo Monaghan.)

Jo battles first for survival, then independence, then dignity and love. On the way she befriends a tidy roster of those oppressed in the West: a homesteading Russian family menaced by Eastern land speculators; a Chinese railroad worker in danger of lynching (David Chung); a prostitute (Olinda Turturro) on whom a miner with some very deep ambivalence about women (Ian McKellen) exercises his hostility; and a young woman hoping for marriage in an unpromising setting (Heather Graham). Almost against her will, Little Jo ends up buddies with a traditionally macho fellow rancher (Bo Hopkins).

Are you wondering whether you haven't already missed this film on PBS? The production values also smack of the wholesome—

they are safely splendid except when they show that the budget ran short.

And yet *Ballad* is the kind of film you end up talking about for days afterward. The Western was established early on as a showcase of the alienated hero, and has always served as a metaphor for our civilization and its discontents.

This movie takes that notion a step further, making its central characters people who force reconsideration of the white man's world central to the Western myth. Like other recent gender-bending films—*The Crying Game* and *Orlando*—*Ballad* uses the perspective of gender to re-envision the familiar. The problem is set out starkly and promptly: the lovely young woman walking down the road is a slow-moving target

for anything from jeers to murder. It's easy to get us to empathize with the protagonist's decision to dress like a man. It's a little harder to



The Ballad of Little Jo
Directed by
Maggie Greenwald

Suzy Amis with
writer/director
Maggie Greenwald
on the set of *The
Ballad of Little Jo*.



Bill Foley

“Women experience life differently”

Director Maggie Greenwald has emerged out of basic training in both the New York and Los Angeles film production communities to write and direct her own films. *The Ballad of Little Jo* is her third, after *Home Remedy* (with an “anti-yuppie” hero) and an adaptation of noir novelist Jim Thompson’s *The Kill-Off*. On the strength of her background and the Little Jo story, she got independent distributor Ira Deutschman at Fine Line—a man who likes an artistic gamble—to put up half the money for the \$4 million production.

The following is what Greenwald—on a film tour stop in Washington, D.C.—had to say about the making of *Ballad*:

“I always wanted to make a Western, to reinterpret those conventions—the rugged individualist carving out their own place—from a woman’s perspective. It was a challenge to find the right vehicle. When I read the sketchy history of Jo Monaghan, I realized that I could use it as a premise for a story about a woman searching for her place in the world, and also rework the Western convention.

“I had great support from the producers. It’s true that [executive producer] Ira Deutschman was concerned with ‘getting rid of excess,’ moving the plot along. And some of his suggestions were right on the money. But I also wanted to take time to pay attention to the details.

“I feel that there is a woman’s point of view, that women experience life differently than men, just as blacks or Asians also experience life differently from whites—there’s a different sensibility, a different way of storytelling. A female sensibility will explore, not just cut to the chase; there’s a focus on feelings, starting from the interior. And if you’re focused on detail and process, you’ll have a slower pace.

“These points of view are not expressed in our [commercial] popular culture. They’re considered noncommercial because they’re new [to the marketplace]. But I think we’re learning that people are interested, that there is an audience.

“What drew me to the story were the contemporary issues that resonate throughout it. Is it safe to travel alone today? How many women do you know who grow up not afraid of rape? How do the constraints on our behavior make us less than whole? We’re all degraded by our socialization, men and women alike. Guys are socialized to think it’s OK to be degraded, not to feel.

“But I also felt a responsibility to the time and place, and not just to be politically correct. There are, you will notice, no Indians in the movie. “A Western without Indians?” one of our producers said. But it would have been striving for political correctness to insert such a character into a mining camp in that era. Also, there are only a couple of black characters, and they’re in the background, except for the laundress [Barbara Jean Marsh]; this was the 1860s, when only a few blacks would have been mining gold in the region, and they would have been separate. Oh yes, and a gay publication has accused us of being too heterosexual. You can’t address everyone’s issues.

“Out of this experience I have come to a clear commitment to make films about women’s lives. I think it’s time.” —P.A.

© 1993 Pat Aufderheide

convince us that she can convince anyone else she's a man.

But it's not hard at all to persuade us to see the mining camp from her perspective. The dismaying site of a mountain tent city in autumn, the close-ups of guns, the back-breaking work are nothing compared to the faces and voices Little Jo must confront. Never has facial hair been used so aggressively. A combination of production design, casting, and camera angles makes the male faces that loom before Little Jo particularly ominous, alarming unto the grotesque—even when they smile. Each interaction only underlines Little Jo's need for caution and distance.

The loneliness Little Jo must suffer to survive makes her victory seems Pyrrhic. Gradually the viewer realizes that this brutal division of humanity creates a deep loneliness inside everyone, not just the marginalized.

Just when it seems like Little Jo has worked out an accommodation to a white-men-only world, in comes money. An Eastern cattle company, represented by a man who might as well twirl his mustaches (Anthony Heald), buys up surrounding land and kills anyone who won't sell. Will Little Jo give up her homestead, or stick by her rancher buddy Frank, and refuse at the risk of death? And what's to become of the Chinese itinerant, "Tinman" (David Chung), who now functions, effectively, as her wife?

A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.

The Ballad of Little Jo lingers because the characters are evoked with a credibility that forces us to put down our guns, so to speak, to surrender our cynicism. Greenwald's

script and direction leave ample space for the character actors who crowd this film. The casting makes a low bow to theater, where many of the actors (including Amis) have been repeatedly honored. Viewers will recognize Bo Hopkins from *Midnight Express*, and possibly as well from films and TV programs ranging from *The Wild Bunch* to *The Rockford Files*.

Ian McKellen is, in presskit-speak, "Britain's leading stage actor" and a prominent figure on U.S. stage as well. He's also a big hit on PBS. David Chung, the Chinese-born actor (*Repo Man*, *Walker*) whose awesome shag is matched by ditto pecs, had almost forsaken acting—no good parts for Asians—by the time Greenwald and Co. found him. Minor characters include René Auberjonois, who Altman fans will recognize in a minute, and Carrie Snodgrass of *Diary of a Mad Housewife* fame.

The film's ambition does outreach its execution; Little Jo's male character evolves more as a negative—what he isn't, i.e. daintily feminine—than what (s)he becomes. The aging of characters is also unconvincing. And the leisureliness of the pace isn't all explained by character development. But the basic notion of the movie easily carries it over its problems.

If Eastwood's highly personal *Unforgiven* was an epic tragedy, the tale of a man caught in his own mythmaking, this is a film about the consequences of that kind of mythmaking for everyone else.

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I N P R I N T

Of Camelot and kings

By David Futrelle

Ross Perot is hard enough to avoid now, bursting onto the prime time airwaves like some low-tech Max Headroom with his half-hour infomercials, but it could be worse. Some inventive capitalists are floating the idea of giant billboards in space, a mile or so across. "Where Pepsi and Kodak are, politicians are sure to follow," warns New York Congresswoman Susan Molinari, a co-sponsor of legislation to ban such advertising. "You may be lying on a hillside and look up to see the face of Ross Perot." I can't get the image out of my mind: the disembodied head of Ross, grinning his awful grin, watching over our world like a pagan god.

Many of Perot's fans do indeed worship him as a sort of deity, looking to his enigmatic pronouncements for signs of wisdom as one might look to an oracle. Perot promises a nostalgic security, an escape from the hard and messy realities of politics, and his supporters are willing to turn themselves over to his political whims—if only to sustain the illusion of this promise.

Though his detractors have often compared Perot to Mussolini, the prickly Texan is more a symptom of our political impasse than a sign of incipient fascism. As William Greider documented in detail in last year's brilliant *Who Will Tell the People*, the key decisions of government take place in the back rooms of Washington. Members of Congress wade through the details of tax legislation to work fixes for what some of them are starting to call their corporate "clients"; politicians of both parties collude to keep the

details of money scandals—such as those involving banks and S&Ls—from the public. The "people" have been pushed into the role of spectators, looking with bemusement on events they cannot control. What's worse, Greider sadly and reluctantly concludes, is that many "have accepted the loss of [political] status without complaint. ... Even alert, active people have internalized a shriveled version of democratic possibility."

The Perot phenomenon is merely one example of what Lewis Lapham, in his new book *The Wish for Kings*, describes as the "fear of freedom" at the heart of American politics. Lapham, the editor of *Harper's* magazine, finds himself disturbed by the feebleness of the democratic spirit in the country that trumpets itself as the ultimate embodiment of the democratic ideal. "For two hundred years it has been the particular genius of the American democracy to exist in a state of more or less permanent uncertainty," Lapham notes, "but we seem to have lost the stomach for the enterprise. All the evidence presented in 1992's presidential campaign—the paltry speeches, the definition of politics as a synonym for economics, the media spectacle, the apathy of the electorate, the enthusiasm for Perot—testified to the retreat from politics."

A trenchant critic of democratic decay, Lapham is also a sharp observer of the venalities (and the essential banality) of America's bipartisan elite, of the fawning ambitions of those in search of power—in politics, in business, in the media. Lapham learned early on that politics is about connections, not about principles. But he's still shocked by the astonishing ability of Washington insiders to put anything aside (their principles, their dignity, not to mention simple justice) in their relentless pursuit of influence.



The Wish for Kings: Democracy at Bay
By Lewis H. Lapham
Grove Press
213 pp., \$21

Rethinking Camelot: JFK, the Vietnam War, and U.S. Political Culture
By Noam Chomsky
South End Press
172 pp., \$14

The sharpest words in Lapham's book, though, are reserved for the complaisant courtiers of the Washington press corps, who long ago surrendered whatever critical abilities they might have had for a chance for access to the powerful. During his own turn on the White House beat many years ago, Lapham learned that Washington "correspondents ... did what they were told and took what they were given, and in return for their courtesy and good behavior they were granted the illusion of thinking themselves situated at the still center of the turning world."

The Wish for Kings is written with such offhand grace that even its footnotes are a pleasure

to read. But it's not so much a book as an essay with stuffing. Lapham is a kind of insider dissident, drawing much of his evidence from cocktail party chitchat with the Movers and Shakers; his book is perhaps best seen as a supplement to Greider, an engaging account of the symptoms (if less so of the causes) of democracy gone awry.

If Lapham crafts his phrases with obvious relish, it is clear from the first pages of Noam Chomsky's *Rethinking Camelot* that this is a book he wishes he didn't have to write. But it is a necessary one, nonetheless. *Rethinking Camelot* is an extended response of sorts to the controversies stirred up by Oliver Stone's manipulative, implausible *JFK*, and (more broadly) to the misguided resurrection of the Camelot myth in recent years by many liberals and even some, like Stone, who consider themselves progressives. The film, relying heavily on John Newman's *JFK and Vietnam* and on the more elaborate conspiracy theories of Fletcher Prouty, posited that Kennedy was knocked off by the military-industrial complex (possibly with the active support of LBJ) because he was planning to extricate the U.S. from the growing tragedy in Vietnam.

Chomsky casts doubt on all of the film's major premises, dismissing the almost hallucinatory extravagance of Stone's conspiracy theories and his glorification of JFK. (Stone, you may recall, had Jim Garrison/Kevin Costner describe the dead Kennedy as "our slain father-leader," hardly a term reflecting a reasonable assessment of the president or a clear understanding of democracy.) Carefully deconstructing the claims of Newman and other Camelot revivalists, Chomsky shows how deeply Kennedy, like the war itself, was rooted in Cold War ideology.

Newman and others have built their case for Kennedy as a "secret dove" on slender evidence indeed—primarily on a few private, vaguely dovish comments the president made to Sens. Mike Mansfield and Wayne Morse. Like most politicians, Chomsky notes, Kennedy was adept at telling people what they wanted to hear; the overwhelming bulk of Kennedy's statements on Vietnam reflected a Cold War mindset. Far from threatening the military-industrial complex, Kennedy (who raised defense spending from \$45 billion in 1960 to \$52 billion in 1962) was one of its main benefactors. As Chomsky acknowledges, there may have been some sort of low-level conspiracy—composed of right-wing Cubans, the Mafia, or some other unsavory elements—behind the Kennedy assassination. But if so, so what? There was a continuity in policy between the Kennedy and

Johnson administrations, and the assassination changed little in the calculus of war.

As Chomsky shows, Newman's account is riddled with inconsistencies and illogic. His main contention, Chomsky notes, "seems to be that JFK was surrounded by evil advisers who were trying to thwart his secret plan to withdraw without victory, though unaccountably, he kept giving them more authority and promoting them to higher positions...." Ever inventive, Newman tries to turn the most contrary evidence to his favor, claiming that Kennedy's hawkishness, public and private, was a subtle and "brilliant" strategy to keep his powerful opponents off guard. But, as Chomsky points out, by using this kind of "logic," inventive sophists can dredge up "scattered hints and other debris" in the vast historical record that, with the requisite creativity, can be taken out of context to support almost any contention.

The retroactive resurrection of the Camelot myth by purported progressives, like the contemporary support for Perot, is deeply troubling: it implies that all would be well if only the right elites ran the world. "It seems more than coincidental," Chomsky observes, "that fascination with tales of intrigue about Camelot lost reached their peak in 1992 just as discontent with all institutions reached historic peaks, along with a general sense of powerlessness and gloom about the future, and the traditional one-party, two-faction candidate-producing mechanism was challenged by a billionaire with a dubious past, a 'blank slate' on which one's favorite dreams could be inscribed." But we can't trust our dreams to self-appointed saviours and political phantoms. If we want to escape the present political morass, we've got to do the job ourselves. That's what democracy is all about.



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The search for Pierce

By Ilan Stavans

Back in 1985, a few months after I first came to the United States to study philosophy, I had a discussion with a teacher of mine about the American psyche—so obsessed with practicalities and thoroughly unconcerned, I thought, with metaphysical speculation. He recommended that I look up the work of Charles Sanders Pierce, a mathematician and scholar of language who, in ways more daring than William James and John Dewey, opened up the field to a new concept of truth.

Hungry to know more details about this “most original American mind,” during the next few weeks I found myself searching for clues in libraries across New York, trying to figure out who Pierce was and why Umberto Eco, Karl Popper and Noam Chomsky, among others, viewed him as groundbreaking. My search was futile: aside from Pierce’s own arcane work, dispersed in magazines, anthologies and volumes of collected papers, only encyclopedia entries and occasional references in secondary works offered any insight into the man behind the name. Born in 1834 and dead at 75, no biography of Pierce had ever been written. The eclipse of Pierce’s life story and the mystery surrounding his reputation only added to my interest.

Joseph Brent’s extraordinary biography finally fills in the abysmal gap. A native of Cambridge, Mass., Pierce was the son of a Harvard professor and later on a student at the same institution. Throughout his life, he projected an aura of genius, launching an impressive career as a critic—his contributions to *The Nation*, for example, on topics like Leibniz and Henry James, still stand out. But he made numerous enemies, including Harvard’s president Charles William Eliot, and thus found it difficult to secure an academic position.

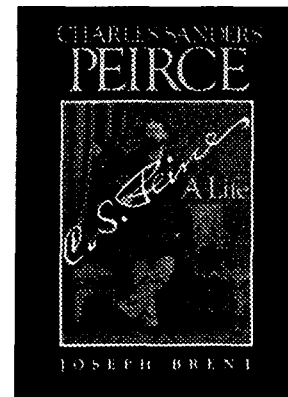
He wasn’t a charming man, to be sure. As a pupil once put it, Pierce “was affected by a superficial reticence often associated with the scientific temperament. He readily gave the impression of being unsocial, possibly cold, more truly retiring. At bottom the trait was in the nature of a refined shyness....” He suffered from facial neuralgia and wide swings of mood. Embarking on an affair with a woman who would become his second wife, he was thrown out of academic associations, and during his later years he suffered

from precarious health and the worst of miseries.

Yet Pierce remained tireless until his very last days. Ambitious and pedantic, his dream, in his own words, was “to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling up of its details.” Indeed, Pierce’s research on logic, linguistics, epistemology and the philosophy of language opened up the path to modern discussions of semiology, to the kind of debates that have swept American campuses during the last two decades. And his development of a philosophy of Pragmatism (not to be confused with William James’ Pragmatism) and “logical socialism” (which he understood as a practicing community of inquirers) have a true American imprimatur.

The story behind *Charles Sanders Pierce: A Life* is as compelling as its content, proving that the philosopher’s life after death has been as cursed as was his stay on this earth. Brent, a student at UCLA, completed his dissertation on

Pierce in 1960, and planned to spend the next five years revising the text for publication. But, for unknown reasons, someone at Harvard, which holds a large collection of Pierce papers, refused to allow him access to important biographical data and forbade him from quoting from letters and other materials. Years later, Thomas A. Sebeok, a professor at Indiana University, came across Brent’s name in a footnote in a book about Ralph Waldo Emerson, decided to get hold of the dissertation for himself, located Brent and asked him to revise the work. Three decades after the dissertation was written, the obstacles at Harvard were now gone. Thus the biography was



**Charles Sanders Pierce:
A Life**

By Joseph Brent
Indiana University Press
512 pp., \$35

happily enlarged, illustrated and published in a first-rate edition by Indiana University Press, which has been republishing Pierce’s work since the late ’70s.

An outstanding addition to the study of the history of ideas in the United States, Brent’s biography performs an invaluable service, opening up an obscure corner of the American mind by examining the ups and downs of the nation’s most original (and perhaps only true) philosopher. ◀ Ilan Stavans, a Mexican novelist and critic, teaches at Amherst College. His latest book is *Tropical Synagogues*, an anthology of Jewish-Latin American stories (Holmes & Meier).

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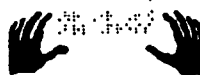
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them out to be. While many in Washington face harsh and almost continual scrutiny from the press, "Mr. Foster received only modest criticism, except from the *Journal*, for anything he did." Most Washingtonians, Apple sniffed, "endure the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and press on with their lives as best they can."

But Foster's death, by all indications, no more fits these easy narratives than Hansen's fit the stories woven around him. No one—no rational person in command of their faculties—commits suicide because of a few snide remarks made about them in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*. Something else caused Foster's death—and that something was most likely clinical depression.

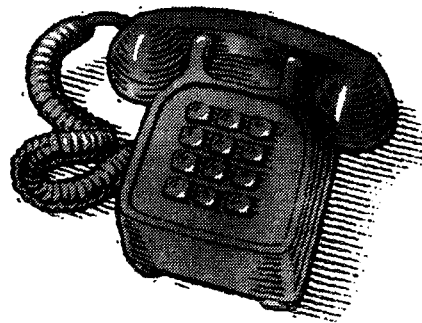
Depression is a savage and insidious disease—all the more insidious because too often it is not recognized as a disease, either by those who suffer from it or by those around them. In the final few weeks of his life, according to those close to him, Foster began to show many of the telltale signs of depression—sudden and inexplicable weight loss, sleeplessness, extreme feelings of guilt, and an uneasy withdrawal from his friends. These symptoms (and presumably others) apparently led Foster's doctor to a diagnosis of depression; he prescribed Desyrel, an antidepressant. Given more time, the medicine may have worked. But Foster, facing a terrible misery, took what he saw as the only way out.

Every year, some 30,000 Americans take their own lives; 70 percent of them are driven to the act by clinical depression. "[T]he vast majority of those who do away with themselves," novelist William Styron has argued, "do it not because of any frailty, and rarely out of impulse, but because they are in the grip of an illness that causes almost unimaginable pain."

Too often, depression is regarded as little more than a failure of will—as a self-indulgent tendency to dwell on the negative, a malingering codependency of the soul. Those who are depressed are typically blamed for their own misery, told (often by well-meaning friends) to "just snap out of it," to "stop complaining," to "cheer up." Too often, those who seek treatment for the illness are stigmatized as cowards.

Because of its inherent irrationality, depression confounds the normal narratives of political and personal life. Those who try to tell Foster's story as one of cruelty or cowardice, like those who made Hansen into a symbol of post-war promise unfulfilled, are missing the point. For those who are depressed, as Styron writes, even "[t]he smallest commonplace of daily life, so amenable to the healthy mind, lacerates like a blade." Depression—what Styron calls "a kind of biochemical meltdown"—distorts rational judgment, makes the world seem much tougher, much more tragic and miserable, than it really is. It destroys, at least temporarily, much of the human capacity for resilience.

Those who are depressed need, above all, understanding and support—as well as proper medical and psychiatric treatment. They don't need self-appointed experts, confident and detached, to remind them that life is unfair. ◀



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I N T H E E N D

Sudden deaths

By David Futrelle

Suicide, to those looking on it from afar, defies rational explanation. When Roger Hansen, a professor of international relations at Johns Hopkins, took his own life several years ago, his friends (among them writer Calvin Trillin) were left scrambling for answers. To his classmates at Yale in the '50s, Roger Hansen—then known as Denny—had seemed “an all-purpose boy hero,” a perfect specimen of Eisenhower-era Ivy League manhood—his accomplishments seemed to come as easily as his smile. Now his death seemed symbolic too—a warning of the multifarious psychic burdens of early promise.

But, as Trillin suggests in *Remembering Denny*, his account of Hansen's death and its aftermath, it is no more fair to make Hansen a symbol in death as it was to do so in life. As Trillin sorted through his own memories, and those of Hansen's friends and colleagues, he realized that there had always been “something haunted” about his classmate. Even at Yale Denny had had “black moods that were unexplained and maybe inexplicable,” moods he had attempted to cover over with a mask of easy sociability. Over the years his charms dissipated, but the moods remained; he seems to have suffered, throughout his life, from chronic and debilitating depression. In his last years Hansen was almost completely alone, so isolated from his family he was not even sure if his mother was alive or dead. His suicide clearly had more to do with the irrational imperatives of depression than with his presumed disappointments over not living up to expectations.

In recent weeks, Washington, D.C., has been trying, unsuccessfully, to make sense of a death as seemingly inexplicable as that of Roger Hansen's. When news broke of the July 20 suicide of Vincent Foster, a

White House legal adviser and close friend of Bill Clinton, wild rumors began to spread almost at once—in particular, rumors of a forthcoming exposé in the right-wing *Washington Times* that would reveal Foster's hidden homosexuality, or perhaps an affair with Hillary Rodham Clinton. (The speculation turned out to be just that—speculation.) Many of Foster's friends blamed the death on the savagery of the press, in particular that of the *Wall Street Journal*, which had taken after Foster in a series of editorials. Foster himself, in a suicide note of sorts made public shortly after his death, bitterly denounced Washington as a city in which “ruining people is considered sport,” and attacked the editors of the *Journal* as purveyors of vicious falsehoods about him.

Since then, the debate over the causes of Foster's death has shifted away from speculations about Foster's alleged private improprieties to questions about the pressures, personal and professional, faced by Washington insiders, who pride themselves on presenting a tough and unflappable exterior. Much of the discussion has been tinged with disapproval, implicit or explicit, of Foster's admissions of anguish. “Tragically, Vince Foster never learned ... to hunker down,” columnist Carl T. Rowan wrote. “The clear lesson to job-seekers is that if you can't withstand the hailstones, don't walk into this never-ending Washington storm.”

Similarly, R.W. Apple, writing in the *New York Times*, noted that the press attacks on Foster had not been as bad as some, including Foster himself, had made

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